

Unveiling the Untold History: Black Nationalism Cults and Churches in Chicago

Chicago, the vibrant city known for its rich culture and diverse communities, also played a pivotal role in the early studies of Black nationalism cults and churches. These institutions served as the backbone of the African American community, fostering solidarity, resistance, and empowerment during tumultuous times.

Exploring the Rise of Black Nationalism

Black nationalism emerged as a response to pervasive racial discrimination and systemic oppression faced by African Americans. It advocated for independence, self-determination, and the establishment of a separate black nation, free from white supremacy. In the early 20th century, numerous cults and churches in Chicago became hotbeds for this revolutionary ideology.

The Moorish Science Temple of America

One of the earliest and most influential Black nationalist movements in Chicago was the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA), founded by Noble Drew Ali in 1913. Ali preached a message of racial pride, advocating for the restoration of African heritage and the rejection of white dominance. The MSTA blended Islamic teachings with elements of Freemasonry and appealed to many African Americans seeking identity, purpose, and social upliftment.

Early Studies in Black Nationalism, Cults, and Churches in Chicago by Walter Boomsma(Kindle Edition)

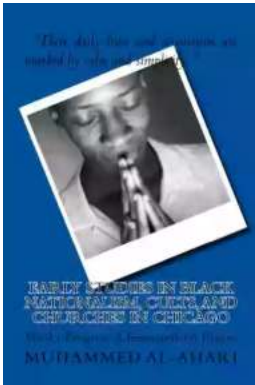
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The MSTA, known for its distinctive fezzes and teachings about the Moorish origins of African Americans, attracted thousands of followers across Chicago. It provided a platform for black entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and activists to unite and challenge the prevailing white supremacist order. The temple's influence extended beyond religious practices, as it actively campaigned for civil rights and challenged racial segregation.

The Nation of Islam

Another prominent Black nationalist movement that originated in Chicago was the Nation of Islam (NOI). Founded in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad and later led by Elijah Muhammad, the NOI advocated for black separatism, self-reliance, and the establishment of an independent black nation. While rooted in Islamic traditions, the NOI developed unique doctrines, including the belief in a Black deity and the idea that white people were inherently evil.

The NOI gained widespread attention through one of its prominent leaders, Malcolm X, who was based in Chicago. Malcolm X played a crucial role in popularizing the NOI's teachings among black intellectuals and activists, urging

them to embrace their African heritage, reject white culture, and fight against racial injustice.

Cults and Churches as Centers of Empowerment

In addition to providing a religious outlet, these Black nationalist cults and churches in Chicago served as community centers, educational institutions, and vital platforms for organizing political resistance. They offered resources and support to promote economic empowerment, educational advancement, and cultural preservation within the African American community.

The Afro-American Police League

One notable example is the Afro-American Police League (AAPL), formed in 1968 by Fred Hampton and other Black Panther Party members in Chicago. The AAPL aimed to empower African Americans by monitoring police activities, raising awareness of police brutality, and fostering community resilience against oppressive law enforcement practices.

The AAPL utilized the charismatic leadership of figures like Fred Hampton to mobilize the African American community and challenge the structural racism embedded within law enforcement. Their efforts ultimately led to increased scrutiny of police practices and pushed for reforms to protect the rights and dignity of African Americans.

The Universal Negro Improvement Association

Another influential organization was the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914. While not based in Chicago, the UNIA inspired and influenced numerous Black nationalist groups across the country, including those in Chicago. It promoted African pride, economic self-sufficiency, and the return of African Americans to their ancestral

homeland - a cause that resonated strongly within the African American community.

In Chicago, local chapters of the UNIA became centers for community empowerment, organizing mass rallies, poetry readings, and educational events. These activities fostered a sense of unity and pride among African Americans, encouraging them to embrace their cultural heritage and strive for social and economic advancement.

The Legacy Lives On

While the early studies of Black nationalism cults and churches in Chicago have often been overlooked, their contributions to the African American struggle for freedom and equality cannot be overstated. These movements cultivated a sense of identity, pride, and empowerment within the African American community, challenging the prevailing white supremacist order and inspiring future generations of activists.

Today, their legacy lives on in various forms, with Chicago remaining a hub of political activism, cultural expression, and community organization. The spirit of Black nationalism continues to empower and ignite the study of African American history, inspiring scholars and activists alike to delve deeper into the untold stories of resilience, resistance, and triumph.

As we continue to uncover the hidden histories of Black nationalism in Chicago, it is crucial to acknowledge and uplift the voices and experiences of those who dedicated their lives to the pursuit of racial justice and liberation.

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This the first collection of the WPA Papers that deal with Islam and Black Nationalism in Chicago. They were written under the auspices of the Black Historical & Benevolent Society called the Julius Rosenwald Fund. This fund was under the direction of the Illinois Writer's Project. Writer such as Arthur Huff Fauset, Jessie Fauset, Richard Wright, Zora Neal Hurston, Lillian Harper, and Arna Bontemps had poetry, sociological studies, and short stories written under direction of the IWP. Julius Rosenwald was a Jewish philanthropist that set up a fund before his death to give scholarships to blacks for school and to pay to collect materials on Black history and culture. The butler of Rosenwald went on to become a precinct captain and later a leader in the Moorish Science Temple. All the groups covered in these studies had connections with each other. Elijah Muhammad called Marcus Garvey and Noble Drew Ali "fine Muslims" and encouraged their followers to follow him as he was only "completing their mission". The studies here were done by Lillian Harper and Arna Bontemps. An appendix gives short notes on the leaders of the various groups and a bibliography gives books and articles to lead researchers to more material.



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