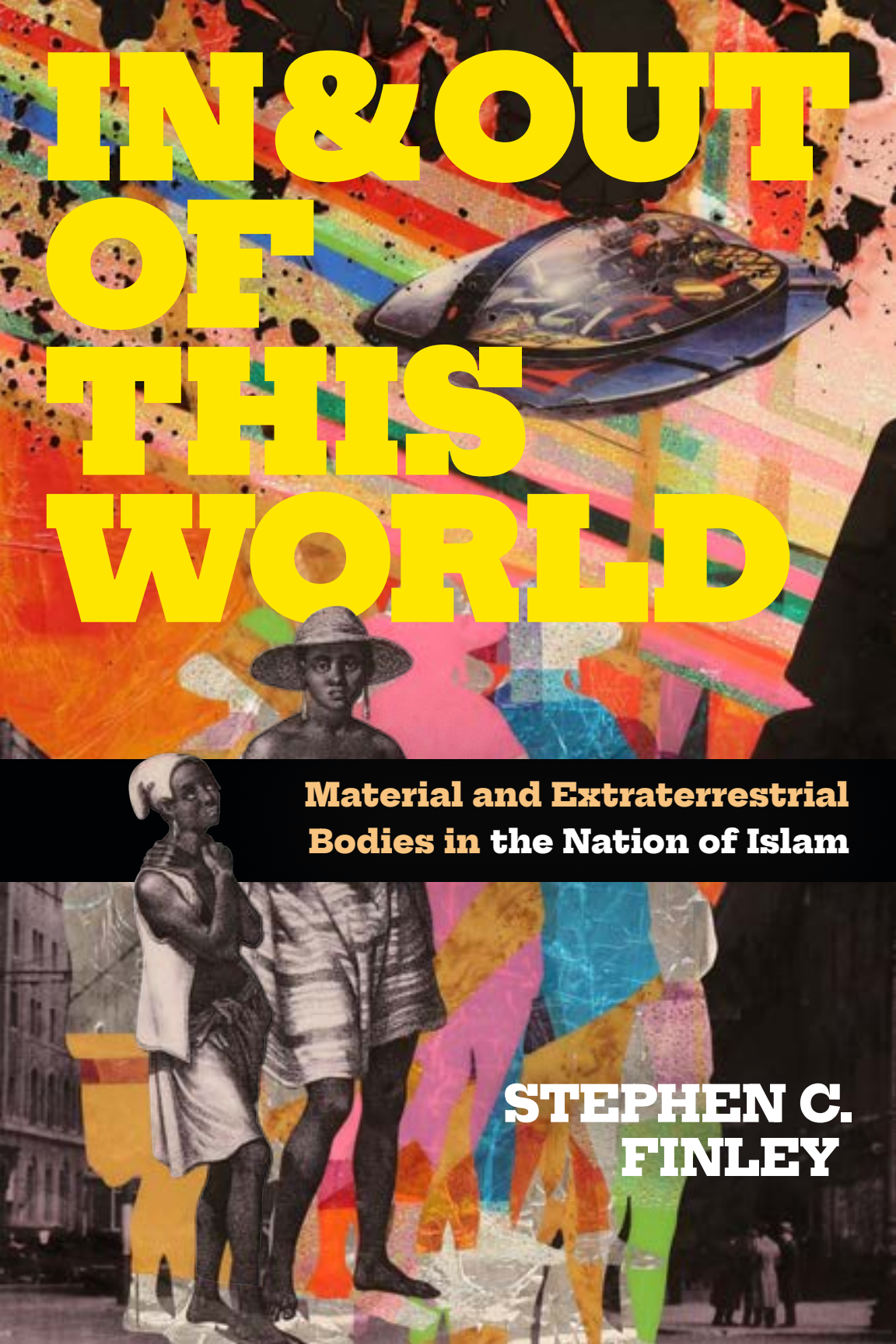
IN&OUT
OF
THIS
WORLD
Material and Extraterrestrial
Bodies in the Nation of Islam
STEPHEN C.
FINLEY

IN & OUT
OF THIS
WORLD

RELIGIOUS CULTURES OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN DIASPORA PEOPLE

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STEPHEN C. FINLEY

IN & OUT OF THIS WORLD

MATERIAL AND EXTRATERRESTRIAL BODIES IN THE NATION OF ISLAM

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To Hattie M. Fuette, my mother, and the memory of my grandparents, Flora Mae Ball and Lovie D. Ball, my cousin, Tony Ward; my aunt Frances Anderson; and Ella Victoria Lane, who always told me to call her “mother”

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INTRODUCTION

BLACK BODIES IN- AND OUT-OF-PLACE

REREADING THE NATION OF ISLAM THROUGH A THEORY OF THE BODY

This is the thinking and attitude of them. To this very day they see you getting out of your place. So forces are working to put black people back in their place.—**MINISTER ISMAEL MUHAMMAD,** Nation of Islam National Assistant Minister, "Farrakhan and the Wheel Part 2"

The Nation of Islam (NOI) is one of the most revered and reviled religious groups in America. For almost a century, the NOI has influenced millions of people in the United States and globally. For example, the NOI attracted support from black people across social class divisions, as well as from other people of color across the globe, especially during times of global unrest such as the Great Depression and World War II.[1] Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Warith Deen Mohammed were among the most recognizable black figures in their respective eras. The same can be said of the current leader of the NOI, Minister Louis Farrakhan. For some, the name "Farrakhan" and the NOI evoke images of anger and inflammatory rhetoric; for others, they evoke images of a sea of largely black and brown men's faces on the Mall in Washington,

DC, in 1995 for the Million Man March and again in 2015 for its twentieth anniversary. But there is far more to Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Warith Deen Mohammed, and Louis Farrakhan than meets the eye—or even what is covered in the popular press and in academic scholarship. And these men certainly disagreed and critiqued one another.

In and Out of This World offers a new reading of the Nation of Islam as a religious organization shaped by a set of complex religious ideas and practices, new racial grammars, cosmologies, and racial uplift ideologies. Understanding the NOI as a religious nationalist group challenges existing scholarship that defines it as primarily—if not exclusively—black nationalist. For Carolyn Moxley Rouse, the author of *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam*, for instance, it is a foregone conclusion that the NOI is a black nationalist movement.[2] I have serious doubts about the claim and the utility of this classification; regarding the NOI as a political black nation-state obscures the depth and complexity of the religious meanings of its activities, despite the fact that nearly every book and article about the NOI treats this political category as a given. Most important, this book argues that what motivated the NOI was (re)forming black embodiment, or efforts to retrieve, reclaim, and reform black bodies from the discursive white normative gaze, bodies first formed in and by the pain and performance for white pleasure during the period of enslavement in America.[3]

The exigencies of race and racism forced the NOI to engage the body. Understood as material and symbol, the body was the central concern for all four of its most influential members. While historical moments—both within and beyond the NOI—may have offered new challenges due to changing temporal, political, and institutional realities, the body remained the central focus in NOI discourses and rituals as it attempted to reconstitute bodies that had been constructed in and by white supremacy, slavery, and violence.

The NOI was only partially successful in its reformative efforts, however: in many ways, it internalized the dynamics and values of white supremacy and, as a consequence, *re*produced and *re*deployed its own system of intra-"race" marginalization and an ambiguous but hierarchical "class" ordering in the NOI and African American community. Such intraracial discrimination was predicated on what I call an *ideal embodied economy* that ranked bodies based on indicators such as "gender," sexuality, and skin complexion. Having co-opted many white middle-class American principles and practices, the NOI converted deeply entrenched matters of "race"

into class discourses. Nonetheless, the NOI regards race and gender markers of the body as critically important to its project. Contending explicitly with matters directly affecting the materiality and meaning of black embodiment is what made the NOI relevant—and anathema—to America at the same time.

In these pages, I offer a theoretical interpretation of the Nation of Islam—that is, a fresh look at its religious practices and discourses in light of its historical, social, and cultural setting in America. I take on, straightforwardly, what these aspects of its religion mean, how they function, and why they matter. My comparative method is influenced by the history of religions. I also draw from a perspective that is informed by psychoanalysis in various modalities, including classical analysis and object relations theory. What will be more apparent in my interpretive project, however, is my use of theories of religion; social theory, especially that of Mary Douglas and Pierre Bourdieu and, to a degree, W. E. B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon; and philosophy of race. Finally, I employ a form of literary ethnography, quoting the speeches and writings of important figures in a way that preserves and represents their voices. Far too often, translations and interpretations of primary texts miss or misrepresent the original meaning, which is why I privilege and prefer primary texts. Such a complex array of resources is necessary to make sense of the religion of the NOI because it was a religious group that, like other African American communities, had to confront the religious meaning of black bodies in a context in which they were controlled, policed, and violated precisely because of their racialized attributes. Anything less does not begin to scratch the surface of understanding the NOI or the meaning of black embodiment for the group. Embodiment is critical because bodies are what are at stake, both physically and discursively, which is to say, the body is understood as made up of flesh and bones, but social meanings are attached to various bodies based on such characteristics, including race and religion. The NOI talks about the body in both ways and reproduces the body in its discourses and rituals.

Black Bodies *In-* and *Out-*of-Place

This text advances a novel theory of embodiment drawn from Douglas's notion of dirt that I call "Black Bodies *In-* and *Out-*of-Place." Douglas's notion of "dirt" in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* attempts to explain every culture's concern with purity and contagion.[4] She insists that it is primarily symbolic rather than a regard for actual dirt,

suggesting that "the more deeply we go into this and similar rules, the more obvious it becomes that we are studying symbolic systems."[5] Douglas's claim is simple: what is seen as a pollutant and hence as *dangerous* to established social systems is that which does not fit fully into a type, lies outside of a class, or, in her words, is ambiguous, anomalous, marginal, or transitional.[6] In short, "Dirt is matter out of place."[7] As "out of place," dirt speaks to contagion.[8]

In the United States, black bodies are framed as contaminating, recalcitrant, or disobedient. They are not easily structured and relegated to particular spaces in which they are expected to stay in place. Police and other white people *perceived* Trayvon Martin's, Emmett Till's, Rekia Boyd's, Sandra Bland's, and other black bodies—including my own—as being *out-of-place*, not belonging, and engaging in activities that were viewed as violating established social conventions that regulate space and activity.

My contention here is that one of the primary ways that identities of black bodies were named out-of-place was through a white gaze that supersaturated them with multiple negative meanings that served the maintenance of whiteness.[9] This is not to deny the relationship between phenotypical whiteness and the performance of whiteness: whiteness is embodied, discursive, and performed. It is only to suggest that there is no absolute correspondence between the two. One need not be "white" phenotypically to perform white behaviors, though the correlation between the discursive and the embodied are intimate. One needs only to acquiesce to the cultural norm of white bodies as the standard of beauty and humanity. In other words, when meaning is created, it can be said that whiteness is seen as the highest valued body, the ideal to which all nonwhite bodies should aspire. Philosophies and theologies that participated in normalizing and stabilizing white supremacy contributed to the proliferation of black inferiority that dehumanized and constructed black bodies as other.[10] This book disputes that black bodies are seen as "dangerous" a priori; rather, they are deemed such only as they traverse the dominant social classificatory system or fail to fit neatly into given taxonomic categories that are meant to govern their meaning and activity and to protect a given social system and cosmology.[11]

In the NOI we find discursive, ritual, and doctrinal claims about what it means for a black body to be perceived performing not only out-of-place but in-place as well. Black bodies "in-place" were bodies that were racialized and whose identities and meanings were viewed as fixed. For the NOI, these black bodies could be perceived as *socially* in-place in that *physical* bodies oper-

ated in defined but limited spheres of activity, which rendered them acceptable and innocuous to white communities. In addition, black bodies could be perceived as symbolically in-place if they bought into and internalized *discourses* and *ideas* of black inferiority; if they were seen as compliant and displayed overly deferential *attitudes* toward whites. Therefore, black bodies that would have been seen by the NOI as in-place symbolically or socially were those that embraced any intellectual state or condition that made them complacent about their subjugation to whites. Christianity, for Elijah Muhammad, was a major sanitizing ideology that rendered black bodies socially and symbolically in-place, in that it was seen as deeply rooted in white ways of living in the world and seeing the world.

In contrast to the white gaze, collective NOI discourses about black embodiment *deplored* bodies that were in-place because they did not challenge or dislodge the racist system of classification in any meaningful way. What the NOI thought was pitiful and ugly was this in-place black body that was constructed in slavery and oppression and the representation of it as slavish, buffoonish, docile, and submissive. The in-place body was the one that danced a jig, ate slave food (such as greens, black-eyed peas, and pork) under the guise of "soul food," and was depicted as animalistic. Furthermore, in-placeness, for instance, was represented as black women constantly available for sexual encounters with white men and as black men who were seen as hypersexual, unintelligent brutes.[12] Largely defined by the racist social system, these in-place black bodies posed no threat to the system and were viewed as acting in accordance with prevailing negative discourses about black people.

As a consequence, the NOI sought to reconstitute such distorted black bodies socially and symbolically. According to Elijah Muhammad:

> Beauty appearance is destroyed in us—not just our facial appearance, but the most beautiful appearance about us, our characteristics (the way we act and practice our way of life). We achieve one of the greatest beauties when we achieve the spiritual beauty and characteristics through practicing them. We achieve the spiritual beauty through practicing or carrying into practice the spiritual laws. . . . We know that we have been made ugly by our enemies . . . by not practicing culture that would beautify [us].[13]

Muhammad appeals to the categories of *in-placeness* and *out-of-placeness* as social and symbolic when he suggests that beauty is something that is physical (social) and spiritual and cultural (symbolic). The NOI was responding to this in-place body that it perceived as mangled and undesirable but that

it wanted to reimagine and re-present as an agential, resistant body that was black and beautiful (read: male, heterosexual, middle class, etc.)—in short, a black body out-of-place.

Douglas's notion of dirt allows us to see that structuring and ordering social relationships, activities, discourses, and attitudes protect the system in ways that render black embodiment innocuous, so that while black bodies are potentially *dangerous* due to their recalcitrance, their in-placeness renders them negated, abject, and antiseptic. The system reacts violently to black bodies that are perceived as symbolically out-of-place; and in the NOI we have a perfect illustration of this, given the violent responses to its mythology of Yakub (a black scientist who some followers of the NOI believed created the white race) and intellectual and rhetorical critiques of American culture and government.

The Body as a Physical Reality and Social Symbol

The NOI is viewed as dangerous for symbolic reasons, not simply social (i.e., biological or physical) ones that involved the activity of its members' physical bodies. In short, treatment of the physical body and the meaning of the body socially and religiously reflect the concerns and anxieties of a given social system.[14] The body is both material and metaphor, or *social* and *symbolic*, where the social refers to the activity of physical bodies and the symbolic indicates the attitudinal, intellectual, linguistic expressions of bodies.

The NOI was responding to imposed racialized conditions of existence that distorted and disfigured black bodies: slavery, lynching, symbolic violence, systematic oppression, and now, the destructiveness, control, and mass containment of the prison-industrial complex that legal scholar Michelle Alexander calls "The New Jim Crow."[15] This is not to suggest, however, that the bodies that the NOI constructed in an attempt to refashion "blackness" were all positive. In fact, it projected some of its responses to the experiences of racism, as this book argues, onto marginalized members of African American communities such as women, African American Christians, and poor people. The processes that the NOI employed to reconstitute black bodies and develop new religious identities often obscured the fact that it (re)produced oppressive discourses and practices.

What remained stable in the NOI were continuous and consistent attempts to disrupt constructions of black bodies as physical enti-

ties (social) and as symbols (symbolic) viewed as the consequences of a system of racism that constituted them as obsequious and inferior, which then affected their vitality and longevity. To be sure, the body, as material and metaphor, was the concern for the NOI throughout its history and in the four transformative moments that are the focus of this book.

Moreover, the NOI used creative and esoteric symbols to resignify race and *blackness* as something transcendent. For instance, the NOI used religious concepts and symbols from various other religious traditions, and it connects the meaning of black bodies in this world to cosmic and otherworldly ideas. One finds the curious discourses on unidentified flying objects (UFOs) that the NOI calls the Mother Plane or the Mother Wheel, heroic characters from Islam, and extraterrestrials—transcendental symbols—that give its world coherence and that make sense of white supremacy and the ever-present violence that is directed at black bodies in the United States. Viewing the NOI as *religious nationalists, In and Out of This World* takes these symbols, as well as the practices and discourses of the NOI, seriously and creatively ties their usage to how the NOI reconstituted the meaning of black bodies in response to concrete matters that affect the quality of life and health of black bodies in the world.

From a black person's customary treatment in a shopping mall to the killings of Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, among others, and from the violent perception and treatment of Barack Obama to two young black people going to a football game, the truth is that black people are constantly navigating spaces and places in ways that speak to a host of different existential, political, social, and—in the case of the NOI—theological/religious dimensions of black life. This book names this navigation; it speaks to what it means to be deemed dangerous or not, and it speaks to the very real consequences of living or being out-of-place. In this regard, black bodies *in-place* and *out-of-place* is no mere binary of in-placeness and out-of-placeness. Rather, these terms name a complex matrix of perceptions of black bodies, which are constructed in a system of white supremacy and its attendant privileges. These perceptions provide a means of protecting and guaranteeing the reproduction of the system and its privileges by policing its boundaries from contamination.

Thus, black bodies can be seen as being socially out-of-place and symbolically out-of-place, socially in-place and symbolically in-place, or any combination of these. When black bodies are interpreted as behaving in ways that do not fit neatly into historical notions of blackness that are

seen as real in the gaze of white supremacy—that is, lived performances of blackness that may be ambiguous, anomalous, transitional, or marginal—they are perceived as out-of-place and as dangerous. This ordering and policing of bodies is not simply about maintaining the current social order. It is about (re)producing in the lived world an underlying and overarching assumption about the place of black bodies that is metaphysical; this ordering speaks to a worldview that transcends the logic and fact of experience; it is a cosmology. Black bodies that were reconstituted by the religion of the NOI in response to the taxonomy of white supremacy, I argue, were and still are perceived as out-of-place in this culture and are, as such, *dangerous* to its maintenance. As a result, white responses to them are vociferous and violent. However, the system rewards nonthreatening black bodies *in-place*. These are the bodies that the NOI sought to (re)construct in its own image of what was beautiful and respectable. In so doing, the NOI's discourses on the body speak to the existential tightrope of being black and religious in a world marked by white supremacy.

Structure of the Book

Recalcitrant bodies, or black bodies that the system perceives as disobedient and resistant, are out-of-place socially and symbolically; therefore, the system reacts to enact a type of social homeostasis that renders black bodies in-place socially and symbolically so that they are no longer a threat or a *danger* to the system. These "tamed" bodies are now desirable to the vested interests of white supremacy, since they safeguard it from perceived contamination. But the NOI sees these in-place black bodies as a distortion or "fall" of black humanity and seeks to reconstruct them.

In chapter 1, "Elijah Muhammad, The Myth of Yakub, and the Critique of 'Whitenized' Black Bodies," an exploration of Elijah Muhammad's theological and discursive assault on in-place black bodies reveals that they were conditioned by the excessive violence toward and lynching of African Americans that he witnessed and that were otherwise part of the everyday reality of African Americans in the southern United States, including in Georgia, the location of Muhammad's birth. Furthermore, after he joined the NOI and became its leader, the myth of Yakub—the main theological, cosmological, and theodicean narrative—gave coherence to his world and helped to explain the violence directed at black bodies.

The myth of Yakub, which explained the origins of the world and the races, also informed Elijah Muhammad's perspective on in-place black

bodies. Subsequently, this mythology shaped his critique of such "whitenized" black bodies. These black bodies, as described in the Yakub narrative, were aesthetically disfigured, psychologically infirm, and religiously demonic. Such was the disposition of bodies that, for Muhammad, had been fixed in-place by white supremacy or, in the language of the NOI, by the devil and his tricks. Muhammad's attention to mythology and religion indicate his privileging of black bodies that would be seen as out-of-place symbolically. The chapter (re)constructs NOI mythology from multiple and disparate sources to make sense of the role it played in the religion of the NOI; in particular it demonstrates the mythology's connection to Muhammad's critique of black bodies in-place.

Chapter 2, "Elijah Muhammad, Transcendent Blackness, and the Construction of Ideal Black Embodiment," shows that ideal or ultimate black bodies for Elijah Muhammad were religious bodies that privileged what would have been perceived by the dominant culture as symbolic out-of-placeness. Muhammad was not necessarily interested in political engagement with an unjust system; instead, he was remaking black bodies that would be prepared for the world to come, a new world after the age of white domination, a world that would disclose black bodies as preeminent and beautiful. The chapter argues first that Muhammad sought to reimagine what black bodies could be and that he used a variety of philosophical and theological resources and rituals in this endeavor. Second, for him, ideal bodies had specific social and symbolic characteristics, constituting a distinct, ideal black bodily economy that distinguished NOI bodies from other black bodies through ritualized and mythologized differentiation. The construction of "the body" here is complex, given that the ritual and discursive sources that constituted these bodies varied depending on whether Muhammad's concern was for the body as a biological reality or the body as symbolization of the NOI collective and cosmology. Restricting these black bodies to the symbolic gestures of resistance rather than to the overtly social ones meant that these bodies were not to engage in mainstream political activities such as taking part in the civil rights movement. They were fashioned for religious and aesthetic purposes. For Muhammad, it was futile to engage in such political work, since the Mother Plane (UFO), an otherworldly but material (transcendent and immanent) vehicle, would come at the end of the age and create a new world and bring ideal black embodiment to fruition. Muhammad's construction of ideal black bodies constitutes a bodily economy that structures class in the NOI based on physical and symbolic factors, such as gender and intellectual ability.

The chapter introduces the notion of *transcendent blackness* to describe the meaning of blackness in the NOI. It means that these ideal black bodies were not simply signified by African Americans but, according to Muhammad, were "black, brown, red, and yellow," suggesting a more vast conception of *black* as a surplus category of race that included Native Americans, Asians, Latinos, and beyond.[16] In addition, blackness had extraterrestrial meaning, since black bodies were related to beings on other planets and were ultimately defined in relation to the Mother Plane, which was the most technological and scientific creation in the history of the cosmos.

Chapter 3, "Malcolm X and the Politics of Resistance: Visible Bodies, Language, and the Implied Critique of Elijah Muhammad," argues that Malcolm X, for many years the national representative of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, inverted or reversed the paradigm of Muhammad. That is, he privileged the social over the symbolic, so that he made black bodies in the NOI publicly visible: by way of his proselytic work in which the NOI grew in membership and in temples and through which he became known to the American public, and by way of his own linguistic resistance through his lectures and speeches. Malcolm X longed to be engaged socially (i.e., bodily) in the struggle for justice, not just symbolically as a distant critic; Muhammad prevented him from doing so. Malcolm X functioned as—indeed, became—a black body out-of-place socially (not just symbolically) in the eyes of the white American public, not just symbolically.

While his speeches and interviews may have led to uneasiness in the media and the populace, Malcolm's rhetoric exceeded simple symbolic gesturing. The chapter argues that he became an active participant in the civil and human rights movements through his speeches and televised interviews. He made explicit his critique of Muhammad and his desire for bodily participation in future struggles for justice after he left the NOI. The chapter counters dominant narratives about Malcolm X that suggest his critique of Muhammad's theology and political practices appeared only after he left the NOI. Such a narrative is not only false, it fails to consider how much of what he did after he left the NOI was still consistent with the teachings of Elijah Muhammad.

Chapter 4, "Warith Deen Mohammed and the Nation of Islam: Race and Black Embodiment in 'Islamic' Form," contends that, in his appropriation of Sunni Islam for the NOI, Warith Deen Mohammed (a.k.a. Wallace D. Muhammad) critiqued both Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X in his construction of black ("Islamic") bodies out-of-place. On the one hand, he disagreed with his father, Elijah Muhammad; for the younger man,

Islam was something much more concrete and fixed (e.g., the Five Pillars) and not esoteric and "spooky," as he claimed his father's religion to be.[17] Furthermore, religion was not something private and exclusive as it was for Muhammad—it was universal. But this Sunni notion of the universality (*ummah*) of religion also posed problems for Mohammed, who recognized the effects of racism on African Americans, and he sought to address their particular (*asabiya*) needs with a relevant form of Islam.[18] Therefore, his attention to and assault on racism was an attempt to recast black bodies *symbolically* and *socially* to dislodge them from the negative associations of inferiority that were attached to them vis-à-vis the racist social system. Mohammed's desire to see African Americans "cultured" through and in Islam was a response that was meant to disrupt the reproduction of black bodies in-place symbolically, and his emphasis on diet, proper attire, and clean living, as well as on voting and participation in social activism and the political process, implies his significant but unequal concern for black (physical) bodies *socially*. Hence, he signifies the importance of black bodies out-of-place socially and symbolically, with the aesthetic difference of moving the NOI to a Sunni form of Islam to, ostensibly, make it cultured and politically active. In doing so, however, Mohammed critiqued Malcolm X, for whom religion and social responsibility were somewhat separate (which required that Malcolm found the Muslim Mosque, Inc. [religious] and the Organization for Afro-American Unity [sociopolitical] separately). Subsequently, Mohammed embraced a distinctive tradition within African American Islam, and within the NOI in particular, that was consistent with that of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X and held the ostensible universal (i.e., Islam) and the obvious particularism (i.e., race, culture) in tension. That is, the body and the significance of race remained the central focus of the religious meanings that Mohammed employed, even throughout his transition to a manner of religion that was more closely related to international forms of Sunni Islam. Thus, his consistent attention to race in his early years indicate his privileging, like his father, of the symbolic over the social.

Chapter 5, "Mothership Connections: Louis Farrakhan as the Culmination of Muslim Ideals in the Nation of Islam," pays special attention to Louis Farrakhan, arguing that his Islamic thought and praxis was and is the aggregate of all his predecessors: Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Warith Deen Mohammed. Farrakhan gives his most poignant expression of the nature and meaning of the black body in his discourses on his mystical experiences with the Mother Plane, or what he calls the Mother Wheel, a UFO.[19] Embodying an aggressive discursive, intellectual, and confrontational

engagement with America and the US government, Farrakhan's numinous and sociopolitical response to the meaning of the Wheel reveals the pinnacle of black bodies out-of-place socially and symbolically.

Most important, Farrakhan claims to have been taken into a UFO on September 17, 1985.[20] While few studies on Farrakhan and the NOI give sustained theoretical attention to his "abduction narrative," this esoteric, mystical, and epistemological experience of the Wheel is Farrakhan's organizing metaphor for interpreting black bodies—and it, indeed, provides the necessary narrative that gives ultimate coherence and purpose to his life and ministry. Finally, as the culmination of all of his predecessors, Farrakhan elevates social and symbolic out-of-placeness to equal status as he attempts to construct a form of Islam that is sensitive to the social and historical circumstances of African Americans while, at the same time, connecting them more strongly to Muslims in the international religious milieu. *Race* is a significant metaphysical category for Farrakhan as he connects the ultimate meaning of black bodies to the Mother Wheel that he also views as empowering and protecting him to speak and act on behalf of colonized people of the world—people whom, like Elijah Muhammad, he recognizes as "black."

In the conclusion, "(Re)forming Black Bodies, White Supremacy, and the Nation of Islam's Class(ist) Response," I argue that what the Nation of Islam was attempting to accomplish was to (re)form black embodiment that, according to the NOI, had been disfigured in every conceivable way by a white supremacist culture that affected and structured all major aspects of black social life, including religion. Christianity, for the NOI, participated in this grotesque construction of black bodies socially and symbolically in-place, not simply through its images of a white Jesus or white depictions of the Divine in the broader sense, but also in the meaning that it attached to black bodies and in the ways in which it constricted the activities of African Americans to keep them from attaining their own liberation. "Islam," in its various forms, by contrast, was viewed, in general terms, as the appropriate vehicle that could raise the status of black bodies—culture them, beautify them, ennoble them—and give them the motivational, ideological, and metaphysical grounding to push toward their fullness with regard to their material existences. The result was the construction of a *classed* black body within the NOI that structured class in terms of which bodies could be in leadership roles; the NOI rendered other bodies, especially Christian ones, as an inferior class. Indeed, it was strategies such as these, whose primary intent may have been subversive

to the dominant order, that invariably reproduced and re-created the very inequality the NOI sought to ameliorate and destabilize.

Pierre Bourdieu's monumental social theory in *Outline of a Theory of Practice and Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* gives me a way to talk about this classed body hierarchy and the ways in which it structured class discourses that were directed not at white bodies but at black bodies both within and outside the NOI. The problem, as I see it, is that this classed body and these conversations did violence to other black bodies: they collapsed African American complexity and diversity, ontologized an ideal black body as if it corresponded to something real in the world, and legitimized class distinctions that were based on the approximation of bodies to this ideal. As a result, they rendered particular black embodiments problematic and left unmarked and stable intersecting—white supremacist, classist, sexist, homophobic—systems of oppression. Therefore, such discourses based on this economy functioned to make a qualitative class distinction between NOI bodies and other black bodies and can generally be seen, I maintain, in the thought of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Warith Deen Mohammed, and Louis Farrakhan.[21]

"Wheels, Wombs, and Women: An Epilogue" points to critical directions of research that *In and Out of This World* reveals, particularly the lack of attention to women in the NOI and their embodiment. I review recent scholarship on women in the NOI.[22] The book locates this discussion in UFOs and in Louis Farrakhan's recent speech commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Million Man March, in which he frequently made reference to African American women and respectability. That is to say that he pointed to women in the NOI as models for how African American women should present themselves: as domesticated and cleanly dressed. Moreover, he made several references to "wombs," rendering women's bodies not as their own but as metaphysical. They are viewed as the vessels in which and through which black masculinity and order in black communities might be ensured. Such a discourse is connected to his UFO (Wheel) narrative, in which he imagines himself reborn in a symbolic womb (i.e., the UFO) and emerging as a sage. Therefore, he, rather than women, is the real exemplar of women's bodies, an example to black people of the positive results of control and management of the physical bodies of black women in service of their religious and metaphysical purposes. In short, Wheels, Wombs, and Women are interconnected, which means that in the NOI women's bodies are not their own. The emphasis, then, is on the symbolic, since women's bodies are objectified and have a reduced meaning that is framed in androcentric terms.

"The 'Louis Farrakhan' That the Public Does Not Know, or Doesn't Want to Know?: An Afterword" is an immediate and contemporary excursus on Farrakhan and the NOI that positions this book as indispensable for future study since it takes on common misconceptions and myths through an examination and interpretation of what may have been Farrakhan's last major public speech, "The Criterion: An Announcement to the World," on July 4, 2020. At the time of its delivery, he was eighty-seven years old. Couched against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, Farrakhan addresses his legacy; interprets what he has been doing for three decades as leader of the NOI; and assesses the implications of that for the NOI, the United States, and the world. He addresses such matters as George Floyd and police brutality; the representation of him as antiwhite, anti-Jewish, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-women; the pandemic and why the NOI opposes the COVID-19 vaccines; and, of course, the significance of UFOs for understanding him, the NOI, and as I argue in this book, black embodiment. It is a dynamic, complex, and amazing speech that is stark in its universality. It calls for peace on Earth through justice. What's more, readers will likely not recognize it as the "Farrakhan" they have come to "know" through the media and negative tropes that are a flattened stand-in for him, his religious thought, and his religious group.

More than the usual recounting of historical data about the NOI's beliefs and practices, *In and Out This World* initiates a theory and method-based trajectory in the study of the NOI and embodiment that will commence a reassessment of scholarship in the field. This book is well positioned to alter fundamentally how members, sympathizers, critics, students, and scholars of the NOI understand the meaning of black embodiment in the Nation of Islam and America.

NOTES

Introduction

1. See Allen, "Identity and Destiny"; Allen, "Religious Heterodoxy and Nationalist Tradition"; Allen, "When Japan Was the 'Champion of the Darker Races.'"

2. Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 8–9.

3. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 8.

4. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 50.

5. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 43.

6. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 49, 119–20.

7. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 44.

8. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, xi. Julia Kristeva extends Douglas in a helpful way here in *Powers of Horror*. Using psychoanalysis as a primary tool of interpretation, Kristeva examines the stuff (i.e., the abject) that in Douglas's schema would be considered "out-of-place," again, those things that were seen as *dangerous* to the system because they were considered potentially contradictory or defiling and therefore subversive to the purity of the social order and worldview.

9. See Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, xii–xiii; Yancy, "Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body," 114–65.

10. See, e.g., Leder, *The Absent Body*, 91–92.

11. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 44, 49, 119–20.

12. hooks, *Black Looks*, 61–73, 87–107.

13. Muhammad, *How to Eat to Live, Book 1*, 102–3.

14. Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 72.

15. Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*. It should be noted, however, that Anthony Pinn, using a Foucauldian analysis, had already theorized about the role of the prison system as a means of controlling and shaping black bodies and how this extended the system of control of slavery and lynching that affected the development of black religion: see Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 68–70, 75; cf. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

16. Finley, "The Meaning of 'Mother' in Louis Farrakhan's 'Mother Wheel.'"

17. Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 92. See also *Chicago Tribune*, March 7, 1976, 38.

18. McCloud, *African American Islam*, 37–38.

19. See Farrakhan, *The Announcement*, 6.

20. Finley, "The Meaning of 'Mother' in Louis Farrakhan's 'Mother Wheel.'"

21. See, e.g., Muhammad. *The Supreme Wisdom*, 1:33–34; Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 2:16. These practices and counter-discourses were only moderately successful, in that some of the negative ideas about black bodies that the NOI deplored were reproduced and deployed in their own narratives. For example, the story of Yakub explained African physical features, including "kinky hair," as resulting from the corruption of original black phenotype when an early dissatisfied God-Scientist in East Asia (i.e., the Nile Valley and Mecca) suggested that members of the Tribe of Shabazz, or the original black people, go into the "jungle" to live there and prove that they could conquer wild beasts. Accordingly, this experience would harden black people and make them able to endure the vicissitudes of life. The resulting aesthetic effect was the appearance of modern black features such as full lips, wide noses, and tightly curled hair.

22. See Finley, "Mathematical Theology, 123–37; Finley, "The Meaning of 'Mother' in Louis Farrakhan's 'Mother Wheel'"; Finley, "From Mistress to Mother"; Finley and Guillory, "'That Girl Is Poison.'"

Chapter One: Elijah Muhammad, the Myth of Yakub, and the Critique of "Whitenized" Black Bodies

1. Tsoukalas, *The Nation of Islam*; Finley, "'The Secret . . . of Who the Devil Is.'"

2. Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, 6–8.

3. See Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 34–35.

4. Evanzz, *The Messenger*, 350.

5. Muhammad, *The Science of Time*, 27, emphasis added.

6. See Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 31.

7. Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 1:17.

8. Cf. Wilson, *Black-on-Black Violence*.

9. Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," 57.

10. Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," 57.

11. See Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 77. Pinn calls this consciousness and ever-present fear "terror."

12. Muhammad, *History of the Nation of Islam*, 26–27. According to Muhammad in this 1964 interview, his maternal great-grandfather was a slave master.

13. Evanzz, *The Messenger*, 19.

14. Evanzz, *The Messenger*, 20. See also Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*, 32.