

# Early Nation of Islam documents found in Detroit

By JEFF KAROUB (AP) – Aug 27, 2010

DETROIT — More than 1,000 documents, including some dating back to the beginning of the Nation of Islam, were found in the attic of a home in Detroit, the city where the secretive movement started 80 years ago, a lawyer said.

Attorney Gregory Reed unveiled some documents, letters and a booklet Thursday at a Detroit mosque, including a rare 1933 signature of Nation of Islam founder W.D. Fard. Reed said the well-preserved documents detail the early structure and teachings of the group founded on the ideals of black nationalism.

"Very few have seen the internal workings of how (the Nation of Islam) was put together," said Reed, whose Keeper of the Word Foundation oversees collections and exhibits that include the works of Malcolm X, Rosa Parks and Nelson Mandela.

He said the boxes which also included detailed literature about the early movement's educational and leadership training were recently discovered by an unidentified man whose family members were Nation of Islam "pioneers." Reed said he was contacted by the family, which owns the home, because of his work with other collections.

Reed described another piece as a "manifesto" handwritten by Fard that became required reading for Nation of Islam members through the 1950s. It was not displayed at the mosque, remaining instead with the vast majority of artifacts in a vault.

He said the material has been reviewed and appraised by several collectors and auctioneers he didn't name. A foundation set up by the family in association with Keeper of the Word controls the rights to the collection.

Reed said officials with the Chicago-based Nation of Islam are aware of the documents and Reed's plans to publicly display them at a proposed center in Detroit. He said the family is working with him on plans for the "W.D. Fard Founder's Center," which they hope to jointly announce within 60 days.

Messages left Friday by The Associated Press for top leaders of the Nation of Islam were not immediately returned.

Lawrence Mamiya, a Vassar College professor of religion and Africana studies, said the documents should be most revealing and rewarding for scholars and others outside the movement. He said the Nation of Islam has a significant collection that isn't shared with nonmembers.

"I think this trove of 1,000 documents is very important for scholarship and for the writing of the history of the Nation," he said. "It won't change much for the Nation itself, but it may change things for people like myself who have never seen these documents."

Fard attracted black Detroiters on the margins of society with a message of self-improvement and separation from whites. Fard said whites were inherently evil because of their enslavement of blacks.

The Nation of Islam was rebuilt by Farrakhan in the late 1970s after W.D. Mohammed, the son of longtime leader Elijah Mohammed, broke away and moved many followers toward mainstream Islam.

The Nation of Islam continues to be led by Farrakhan, who has haltingly moved toward mainstream Islam but maintains a separatist ideology.

Nation of Islam members traditionally have believed that God came in the form of Fard; Islam recognizes only one God.

In the past, Farrakhan's most inflammatory comments have included referring to Judaism as a "gutter religion" and calling Adolf Hitler "wickedly great." Farrakhan has over the years denied claims of anti-Semitism, arguing his remarks are often taken out of context and that criticism of Jews in any light automatically earns the "anti-Semite" label.

A longtime target of federal surveillance, the movement is highly secretive. Even researchers who follow the group closely do not know how many members or mosques it has, or how much money it makes.

(This version CORRECTS Corrects spelling of Lawrence Mamiya's last name, instead of Mumiya.)

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In this photo taken Aug. 26, 2010, attorney Gregory Reed reads from a document in Detroit from the early days of the Nation of Islam. More than 1,000 artifacts were recently discovered in the attic of a Detroit home. The Nation of Islam was started in Detroit in 1930. (AP Photo/Jeff Karoub)



## Map

