



PRAYER TO ALLAH. Black Muslim men, trim and husky, make traditional Islam gesture of readiness to receive what Allah gives.

BLACK MUSLIM'S CRY GROWS LOUDER

'The white devil's day is almost over'

In these days of bloody Birmingham and of jails in the South jammed with Negro demonstrators, these words above ring ominously, heralding an explosive and disturbing force in the Negro fight for civil rights. They are the prophecy of Elijah Muhammad (*opposite*), leader of a sect called Black Muslims, who cries out nakedly of the Negroes' deep rage at whites—"white devils," he calls them. Founded in 1930, but long obscure and ignored, the Muslims have been swept to prominence and significance by the erupting impatience of Negroes willing to risk violence to get equality. In this mood, Negroes who shrugged off the movement now feel a growing response to its angry credo. Negro politicians, sniffing the winds of popularity, are busily courting the Muslims.

Elijah Muhammad, who calls himself the messenger of a black Allah, preaches a confusing religion. But there is nothing confused about his secular doctrine: it is bitter, blunt, intractable. The black man and white man, he says, can never be brothers. Instead of hoping for love and peace from whites, the Negro must expect hate and violence—and be ready to return them. Instead of jobbing the white man's world, the Negro must separate from it and set up an all-black nation in the U.S.

Muslims—there may be as many as 100,000—live in a closed world, barring outsiders. LIFE Photographer Gordon Parks, a Negro and given unprecedented access to this world, found himself forced into an agonizing self-study (*page 31*).