

By: Wilbur Young

Negro Group

Biography

ACTIVITIES OF BISHOP AMIRU AL-MU-MININ SUFI A. HAMID

His holiness Bishop Amiru Al-Mu-Minin Sufi A. Hamid, head of the Universal Holy Temple of Tranquility located at 123rd Street and Morningside Avenue, was born, according to his own statement in Lowell, Massachusetts on January 6th, 1903.

At the age of nine, he was taken to Egypt where he attended an Arabic school until the age of eleven when an uncle who was an itinerant merchant took him to Athens, Greece. Here he acquired a gymnasium Socrates, which is the equivalent of a high school education and later entered the University of Atheneas where he majored in philosophy.

Upon finishing at the university, he made a tour of the continent, studying the various races, nationalities and their conditions. In his travels he spent much time in England, France, Spain, Italy and Germany. It was in the course of these travels that he felt the urge to line up with the masses to do things to better their conditions and especially that of the Negro.

Sufi returned to the United States in 1923 and secured a position with the William J. Burns Detective Agency where he worked in St. Louis, Missouri and Memphis, Tennessee. He soon quit this job and went to Chicago where he became an organizer in the Ahamidab movement in Islam, a Moslem institution with headquarters in Quadian Punjab, India. He left this organization after several months, and formed what

is known as the Illinois Civic Association which was instrumental in starting the first organized boycott for employment of the Afro-American in their respective neighborhoods. This was in 1928 and ultimately succeeded in stirring to consciousness, the weapon of boycott in various Afro-American communities. (Sufi does not use the name Negro for his race. He says that it does not signify anything at all to racial distinction. Every other race is noted for the land they represent but there has never yet been a land or country called Negro which^{is}/only a white man's appellation.)

During the period from 1928 to 1930, the movement utilizing the boycott was responsible for the employment of more than 1800 people in positions ranging from laborers, storemanagers and machine operators to bank tellers in the city of Chicago.

Sufi has covered the length and breadth of the United States, lecturing, preaching and studying economic conditions of his race. This has given him a clear perspective of the problems of Afro-Americans with an eye to the possible solution.

In 1930, Sufi came to New York City where he intended to spend a few months vacation. He hadn't been here long before he had noticed that there were no colored working in any of the shops on 125th Street and yet more than 90% of the population poured over two million dollars annually into these same markets for necessities alone. According to Sufi's own words in the following:

"I decided that since Chicago could put on a drive, so could Harlem. My first approach was to the so-called intelligent people of Harlem, mainly the Baptist Ministerial Conference. I was turned down and told that my proposition was impossible and could never work out.

It was then that I turned directly to the masses and from 1932 to 1935, I spent thirty thousand dollars of my own money in order to put this program over, yet, at this time, our adversaries who stood at the sidelines were informing the public what a fine racket this was and how much money could be made.

By 1936, exhausted by the strain of overwork and lack of funds and above all, deceitful elements in our own organization which resulted in being constantly sold out by our own representatives coupled with the fact that most of the Harlem civic representative groups had solidified their own forces against me.

"During these trying days, I was called a "Black Hitler", not through my own volition but by a group of Jewish merchants upon whom I was putting pressure to hire colored. These men tried to discredit me on the grounds that I was baiting anti-semitism but they gained nothing by this. Later, they formed an organization called the Jewish Minute Men during which time they made a formal complaint to Mayor LaGuardia in which they attempted to throw responsibility on me for inciting the riot of 1935. This was of no avail, on another occasion, they had me arrested for disorderly conduct for which I was freed.

From that point on I stepped out of public life."

Sufi did step out of public life but not out of trouble. His troubles began anew when he met and wooed the famous and equally rich Madame St. Clair, reputed numbers queen whom he wed in an odd marriage pact for 99 years. That affair had an abrupt ending when Mme. St. Clair in one of her fits of temperament fired several shots

at Sufi, one bullet wounding him. For this act, she received a long jail term which incidentally freed Sufi.

His latest exploit was the forming of the Temple of Tranquility at 103 Morningside Avenue. Organized in January, 1938 they have already bought a building and premises valued at \$32,000 with an equity of \$10,000.

The Program of this organization is one of semi-religious activities and based on economic and philosophical sound cooperative enterprises. This organization has already established a cooperative wholesale fruit and vegetable market at 303 West 119th Street; also a thirty car garage with a service station vending gas and oil. The organization has a working staff of nine people on salary.

Sufi, ordinarily called Abdul Hamid, is a huge statuesque type of man about six feet three and weighs about 220 pounds. He has a round bearded face and a pair of unusual chestnut eyes with an intelligent gleam, an eloquent speaker with an unlimited supply of facts. Sufi possesses a vitality and nimbleness that is amazing for a man of his size.

He not only represents a colorful spectacle but has lived that very kind of life. Underneath this veneer that he has, lurks an adventuresome and restless spirit and a keen alert mind. Although his temple is progressing by leaps and bounds (seemingly, he has visions of taking over Father Divine's realm) he intends to return to the sidewalks of Harlem to continue his crusade for jobs and better conditions for his people.

Hamid

OUTLINE BY DOROTHY WEST FOR A PORTRAIT

of

S U F I (for "PORTRAITS OF NEW YORK")

Seven months ago in the spectacular crash of his own plane, a Negro man known to all Harlem as Sufi shot downward to earth and out of mortal existence.

His had been a varied career. He was born in the south and migrated north, where he felt there were easy pickings. He had a limited education, and his one talent lay in creating mass hysteria. He tied his head up in a turban, grew a goatee, and became a soapbox orator.

He acquired a following of the poor and downtrodden, and organized a Negro labor movement. His methods were unscrupulous, and the organization developed into a racket, with Sufi pitting black against Jew, and becoming known in the presses as the Black Hitler of Harlem. He was bought off by the interests he sought to discredit, and with their backing opened his Temple of Tranquility. He became a self-styled divine prophet with hundreds of devout followers, many ex-Divinities.

A portrait of Sufi would be the portrait of a colorful and opportunistic charlatan whose wife, Mme. Stephanie St. Clair, was one of the most vivid characters in the policy business in Harlem. Mme. St. Clair is now in the Tombs charged with the attempted murder of her now deceased spouse.

Such a portrait of Sufi would take him from a corner soapbox to a glittering throne, from rags to purple robes, from the forefront of a Negro labor movement to the spearhead of a mystic shrine.

Sources to be consulted are Negro newspaper files, a former pilot, a former secretary.

Nugent

Sufi
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(Sufi Abdul Hamid)
(The Black Hitler of Harlem)

Privately, Sufi Abdul Hamid claimed to have been born in Africa, becoming an American citizen some eighteen or twenty years later. A persistent rumour has it that he was really born in the South and migrated north to become in later years, the public character whom the world knows.

The story of his life, as told to his intimates and then unavoidably and successfully whispered about, thereby adding to his romantic stature, is that he was born in the Lower Sudan where he had a pet goat named Jaheddiah and led the care-free, communal life of an average little African boy. There he romped with his pet goat-with-the-three-curls-in-his-horns, between the stilts upon which all of the houses in the village were erected, until disaster, as sudden and complete as disaster can be only in fabulous Africa, overtook him. He and his cousin had gone to a near-by village to visit with friends and other relatives, taking along Jaheddiah of course, and were playing and screaming with customary childish glee when some message caused the menfolk of the village to leave them with only the women behind to carry on. The children had hardly noticed their departure. When evening was nearing and it was time that the children return to their own village, little Sufi, his cousin and the well-loved goat started on their way home. They came to the knoll from the top of which they should have been able to see their long-legged village. There were only ashes, smoldering ruins,

the only signs of life being the white chickens pecking jerkily as they walked with seemingly distasteful high steps among the scattered corpses that strewed the wreckage. Three hundred and fourteen people, the entire clan had been wiped out, men, women and children, and Sufi was alone in the world. In such a way did Sufi meet for the first time the far famed British method of appeasement. This skirmish, the results of which were so tragically apparent, was his introduction to and graduation from the Kurdistan Wars.

He returned to the friendly village, which had lost in the same battle most of the men whom earlier he had seen leaving to help their comrades. He stayed there with the women and few remaining men for a few months. But Africa had become a bitter taste on his young tongue and he was already deciding to leave. America! His father had spoken of America. So Sufi joined a caravan going to a port town, to embark from there for 'the promised land.' Since America was the only land which had found name in the vocabulary of his knowledge of countries, all boats must go to America, so he stowed away, with a few dates tucked away in his belt and when hunger drove him to the deck and discovery, he was well on his way to Greece.

In Greece he became a problem. There was no one in Africa to whom the consulate could return him. His whole community and every relative had been massacred. Then a Greek, already with nine children of his own, relieved the embarrassment by adopting the little black boy for the small fee of ten drachmas. Sufi had entered upon the second mystic cycle of life.

He took to his new life and surroundings with the adaptability of a chameleon, learning all the little tricks, begging pennies from tourists, (until he discovered that he could make more by taking advantage of their lack of knowledge of Greek currency values), diving for sponges which he would fill with cement and sell as genuine relics; showing the nearest beach to trusting school teachers, as the beach where Socrates and Pericles wandered and pondered; learning Greek like a native and picking up enough English to beg a little more.

When he was fourteen his adopted father died. Deciding it would be a burden in a new country than among his Greek friends, he left again for America. He landed in Amsterdam. It was winter and he was dressed for the warm Greek climate, in long stockings, ruffled short skirt and tabouch. It was shortly after he had stolen more orthodox and European clothes that he fell in with a group of Arabs whom he accompanied to Cardiff. He stayed there three and one half months, working as a restaurant worker on Church Street at Redwood Place. Then once again he shipped for America, his direction this time a little better since the ship which he chose was 'The Pride of Cardiff' which was bound for Boston.

America was indeed the 'promised land.' There was no end to it or its possibilities. He worked at everything, traveled every where and always before him there was still more America yet to discover. It was when he was seventeen and while he was working as a scene-shifter that he met and married Rose of Broadway. She was

fourteen years older than he, 'passed' for other than the Negro she was, and so was unable to acknowledge her marriage with so black a representative of the race from which she had disassociated herself, so she palmed young Sufi Abdul Hamid off on the curious public as her butler. It was she who made the commercial possibilities of the Arabian parts of his name focal. She drew her lover into her mind-reading act with her. Sufi Abdul Hamid was a name that had a fine high-sounding lilt to it. Rose of Broadway made Sufi aware of that and he never forgot it.

After the death of the Rose, he drifted from place to place, turning his hand, and more important, his mind, to any and everything at which he could make money. Hocus-pocus had gotten into his blood though, and the easier manner in which he could earn money was the way which he sought, usually with great and ever growing success.

He was an ardent and sincere race man, but the fact that he was so sincere was no reason why he should not make money for himself while bettering the lot of his people. The year 1928 found him in Chicago, the organizer of a successful boycott movement which had lined his pockets as it secured better jobs for Negroes. "Don't buy where you can't work" was the slogan which had jockeyed his boycott to success and placed Negroes in department and grocery stores as clerks in all the important businesses in the Negro districts of Chicago.

He rode the crest of his fame into New York, arriving in 1930. Wrapping his head in a turban, (he was remembering that Arabian

name of his), Sufi Abdul Hamid founded the International Islamic Industrial Institution which developed into the Negro Industrial and Clerical Alliance. But he was just beginning to get his stride. During 1931-32 he really began to gain popular favor by demanding jobs for Negroes in the stores along Harlem's largest business street, 125th Street. His strategy, along with his impressive turban of course, was mass pressure which he created through creating first mass hysteria.

But his fight for jobs on 125th Street had to be halted for a time while he and the N.I.A. fought Garvey and the U.N.I.A. Sufi was militant and objected to the pacifist ideology propounded by Garvey. Why colonize? Why settle American Negroes in Africa when there was so much of America? Why not stay and fight for the things that should by rights be the Negroes here in America where most of them had been born and their fathers before them? It was 1934 before he could turn his attention again to the demands for Jobs for Negroes in Negro Communities. Feeling the need for the support of the more responsible Negroes as well as the masses he knew so well how to arouse, he invited the Citizen's Committee to join with him in his fight. They did, and when they tried to usurp his power, Sufi's faith in respectability just vanished. His N.I.A. deteriorated into a racket. He succeeded in getting 125 Negroes placed as clerks on 125th Street. The organization collected fifty cents each week from each of them. He succeeded in forcing the Italian contractors who were repaving Seventh Avenue to hire some Negro laborers and formen. These workmen would work one week and lay off the next so that others of Sufi's followers could also earn a little. Each of

them gave their fifty cents a week also. His organizer and able helper was Ace Parker.

Then, during a brief rest period he entered upon a contract marriage with Madame Stephenie StClair, a numbers Queen. He was running short of money, pomp and glory. Sufi never did anything unless there was the possibility of gain involved likewise. When he had married The Rose of Broadway, he had taken all her money and she was the only woman he really loved, he claimed. When he espoused the cause of the black peoples, a cause which was probably nearer to his heart than anything in the world, there was the certainty of monetary gain to add to the glamour. Stephenie StClair was a powerful person, she handled large sums of money, and money was a commodity for which Sufi had the greatest respect. So, he married Madame StClair.

Then he seems to have left his movement. Certain it is that he disappeared not to reappear until 1938. There had been rumours of a rift between him and his wife, rumours which suddenly seemed to have a foundation when StClair waited for him one evening in the hallway of 209 W. 125th Street, where Sufi's legal advisor, Horace Gordon had offices, and shot him three times. Despite the wounds he had receive , he had been shot in the arm, the tooth and the collarbone, Sufi held his enraged and estranged wife until the police arrived. For that little spat with her illustrious spouse, she was sentenced to from seven to ten years. While these trivial matters were unfolding Sufi found a way to cancel his marital contract with her and he was again an eligible bachelor.

When he leased the property at 103 Morningside Avenue as the shrine in which to set up the first Bhuddist Temple in America, it was disclosed that Sufi had spent his missing three years as a Yogi novice, studying under a Japanese Guru. It seems that there had been conferred upon him the vestments of a neophyte and that his claim to Bhuddism was an authentic one. But Sufi was such a sleight of hand artist that he had successfully claimed four different birth-places in the Southern part of the United States and a more colorful one in Africa, claimed bright and shining adventures on the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa which suddenly seemed plausible when some doubter was confused by the ease with which he spoke Greek, Arabic, Chinese or could make himself understood even in Japanese, Hindustan and various African dialects. One was not surprised at all after such linguistic exhibitions to discover that French, Spanish, Italian and smatterings of German Jewish, slipped from his tongue with the same facile ease that did English.

After his absence from his movement, he decided that he would not use the Jew baiting which had gained him his title of Black Hitler this time, but would find a new goad with which to prod the masses. Father Divine was doing alright in his 'racket' as Sufi labeled it, there had been Becton, the Barefoot Prophet and there always were the churches. Religion seemed to be a good halter-rope with which to lead a trusting flock in any desired direction, so he would have his cult. He imported a shrine from China, purchased the building through Attorney Kasminsky, who was a Negro despite the

Hebraic lilt to his name, acquired two volumes describing authentically the procedure and workings of the true Bhuddist Monastic set-up, called in Ace Parker once again to do the actual organizing and married for the third time. This time to Madam Fuffu Tam, a dream-book expert and voodoo worker. It was mostly her money that put his new project on its feet.

But Sufi was a sensationalist and impatient. He could not wait for his cult to grow. He wanted high-pressure methods, so he bought a second hand plane and hired Kay Price as his white publicity agent. And it was with her and his white pilot that he crashed in his plane on the evening of July 30, 1938. They had been on their way to perform some errand of publicity when the accident occurred, Kay Price was the only survivor.

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Burgroff

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