THE DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION FROM CHRISTIANITY TO ISLAM AMONG INCARCERATED AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the

Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Studies
with a Concentration in Arts and Sciences
and a Specialization in Comparative Religion
at the Union Institute & University
Cincinnati, Ohio

Lillie A. Thomas-Burgess

August 17, 2010
Core Faculty: Stanford J. Searl Jr., PhD and Carol Barrett, PhD

Abstract

This study examines the reasons why African American men with a Christian background have converted from Christianity to Islam while in prison. To understand this phenomenon, the researcher surveyed eighty-two African American men between the ages of 18 and 50 who converted while incarcerated in one of four South Carolina prisons. To investigate the role that social, psychological, and theological issues play in the conversion process, the researcher designed a survey comprised of thirty-one statements and one open-ended question. The responses gleaned from the survey identified the perceived benefits as well as clarified the conversion process of a specific population, incarcerated African American males in four South Carolina prisons.

From the research, it is evident that Islamic religious beliefs and practices afford the inmates more community support when imprisoned, and they benefit from being mentored in relationships. To the respondents, Islamic beliefs, doctrines, and creeds are more clearly defined. Furthermore, the respondents assert that Islamic practices bring about the stimulation of emotional maturity and create a sense of personal protection.

The findings also reveal that conversion from Christianity to Islam allows the men to experience greater unity, create greater awareness of identity, and increase their sense of self-worth. This study illustrates that discipline and structure are important to the men as they make their individual decisions to leave the religion of their childhoods and follow the principles of Islam.

A key implication of this study is the need for other faith-based practitioners to recognize and understand the appeal that Islam has. This religion has successfully

created a change in the respondents' cultures, lifestyles, and identities within the prison system.

Keywords: conversion to Islam, African American incarcerated men, religion, South Carolina, prison

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my deceased parents, John "Bubber" and Eloise Hannah Thomas. They were my first encouragers in the faith, and they were the first two scholars in my life.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the moral support of family members and friends who encouraged me through the challenges I faced during the long process of preparing this dissertation and pursuing my dream to earn the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Unselfish love, support, and prayers were offered to God on my behalf by my husband, Deacon McArthur Burgess (having such patience), children (Joycelyn and Quinn), grandchildren (Kelly, Jeremy, and Alissa), daughter-in-law (Yolanda), Danny, dear friends (Geneva P. Gladden and Jeanette Geiger), prayer partners, and Pastor Fred W. Coit, who stood in the gap for me until prayers were answered. And I further acknowledge my sisters Gloria Jean, Diane, Cathy, Deborah, and my brother, Junior, for their concern and encouraging words.

I would like also to acknowledge my committee: Drs. Stanford J. Searl, Jr., Mark Chapman, Christopher Lovell, Sulayman Nyang, and Rosetta Ross. I appreciate each member whose unique contributions made this research a reality. Their insistence on quality scholarship was essential in my completion of this program. I am especially grateful to Dr. Douglas V. Davidson, my First Core for three and one half years, who meritoriously fulfilled his role, providing knowledge of the institutional policies, and guidance through the dissertation process. In addition, I want to express my appreciation to Dr. George Taylor, an Adjunct Professor, for his guidance for three and one half years, through the methodology and survey process of my dissertation.

Special thanks are extended to Dr. Marguerite Garvey, Curriculum Designer. She was instrumental in helping to develop my program of study. She offered invaluable

advice in designing the courses, and her scholarship, patience, and knowledge were phenomenal.

Special appreciation is given to Dr. Gwenda R. Greene, a Union graduate, for introducing me to the doctoral program of Union Institute and University. She offered constant encouragement and invaluable advice during the writing of this document. She also served as a sounding board as I grappled with thoughts at various stages throughout my dissertation process. Her guidance and long hours of preparing me to successfully complete the Comprehensive Degree Program (CDP) process were exceptional. I also acknowledge Mrs. Mildred Taylor, who shared her expertise in technology, helping me to make my Certification Meeting a success.

I would like to acknowledge Ms. Ruby Blair, Alenda Jones, Mimi Jones, and Drs. Gayle Swanson and Carol Barrett, who shared their skills as editors/readers and contributed greatly to what is grammatically and accurately written in this document. As teachers they enthusiastically shared their expertise, and as a learner, I enthusiastically embraced it. I also thank Reverend Yvonne Frederick and Dr. Beverly J. Mason, who stepped in and served as unofficial readers of the rough draft of chapters three through five. To Dr. Shebby Neely-Goodwin, I render my expressions of gratitude for teaching me the concepts and interpretation of the "Turnitin Originality Report." I must acknowledge and thank Mrs. Faye O. Hardy, who served as reader, contributed prayer, advice and encouragement as this project developed. She has been a source of strength and support for me, especially at those times when I felt like "throwing in the towel." To my colleagues at Benedict College, I thank God for you and your support for five years. It is an honor to serve with such a team of professionals.

I am especially indebted to and grateful for Dr. Cory Amaker, my statistical advisor, who offered invaluable advice in designing the survey instrument and interpreting the results. The expertise he shared was instrumental in developing the statistical process of my research project. I would also like to acknowledge Mr. Ram'on Wideman, another statistical guru, for helping me to easily understand the statistics for this dissertation; actually, it was enjoyable!

Finally, I acknowledge in loving memory my deceased friends and parents: Eddie L. Geiger, whose voice still resonates in my ear to "keep the faith and don't give up," who was encouraging as he combated pain during his illness until death. A special acknowledgment goes to Carol Chambers, my friend for 32 years, who was ill but sacrificed her time to journey from Hillside, New Jersey, to Columbia, South Carolina, at the beginning of my doctoral journey to visit and care for me for one week so that I could keep my focus on my dissertation writing. I also dedicate this document in loving memory to my mother Eloise Hannah Thomas, who taught me how to trust and have faith in God during the challenges that I might encounter and to my father John "Bubber" Thomas, who taught me how to read and count at an early age. He encouraged me to get an education and to read books; both are keys to success.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Preface

One Friday morning around 2:00 a.m. in 1991, my husband and I were awakened by the shrill ring of the telephone. Startled yet somewhat reluctantly, my husband answered.

"If he's arrested by the cops, I will get him out in the morning."

As the shock of those words numbed my body, questions began to crowd my mind.

"Who has been arrested by the cops?" I whispered.

Calmly yet painfully, my husband responded, "Your son has been arrested."

As an associate minister of a Baptist Church, I expect calls concerning crisis situations: tragic accidents, emergency hospitalizations, or even death during the day or even after midnight. What I could never imagine was a telephone call from the police department with the chilling news that our son had been arrested. For solace I prayed and meditated on Psalm 91:10 which says, "Then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent" and Psalm 91:11 which says, "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."

The incident that led to that early morning call resulted in a three-year prison sentence for my son. From this experience, I could identify personally with the pain and suffering of other parents in my church and community whose children faced major challenges like incarceration. Though my son was imprisoned, I loved him unconditionally and supported him throughout this ordeal and even now. But because I was embarrassed that such an event should touch my Christian family, I asked only close friends and family members to pray as my son worked through this ordeal. My principal

prayer request was for the adjustment and survival of my child over the difficult three years of imprisonment he was facing. Since he had never been in trouble with the law, I could only imagine the social and psychological adjustments he would possibly have to make being confined in a cell. He would need the strength to survive. I would need to conquer my pain so that I could support him. Ultimately, I knew that his faith would be tested.

From conversations with law enforcement officers I knew and reading journal articles regarding prison life, I realized that many individuals who enter into prison are subjected to pressures to engage in gang-style associations or even to change their religious beliefs and practices. Although my son did not embrace the gang life style, he became interested in the Islamic faith. During visitations at the prison, I found myself debating with my son the merits of Islamic beliefs and practices versus his Christian upbringing. My son argued that Christianity was a "white" religion, but Islam was the "true" religion for African Americans. He also asserted that "we came to America with our own religious beliefs and practices, but they were suppressed by Christianity, the "white" religion. We often compared and contrasted the beliefs and practices of both Christianity and Islam. As his mother and as a Christian, I was disturbed by his thinking because if he did decide to convert, he would possibly be ostracized and hated in our community. Steeped in my faith which was sustaining me during this crisis, I wondered what Islam offered to meet his needs that Christianity did not. During this period, my husband and I prayed specifically for the spiritual needs that our son was seeking and that he would find his answers in the almighty God. In spite of all his turmoil and pressures

from Sunni inmates who had befriended him, my son ultimately concluded that conversion was not right for him.

As I continued to pursue my love of learning and teaching, in 2000 I began teaching a course in religions of the world and biblical studies at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina. In order to enhance my knowledge in my discipline, I decided to enroll at the Union Institute and University in a doctoral program, with a concentration in Arts and Sciences and a specialization in Comparative Religion. My son's prison experience, my own career path of teaching comparative religion, and being a Baptist minister sparked my interest in delving into the social, psychological, and theological reasons why incarcerated men desire to convert from Christianity to Islam. To do this, I chose to investigate personal factors and social experiences of incarcerated African American prisoners in South Carolina (as my son had formerly been) to discover social, psychological, and theological reasons why they desired to convert from Christianity to Islam.

While I learned much about the cultural, traditional, and the social components of Islam and its teachings from prominent research on conversion, the participants in this research project expressed powerful ideas concerning the appeal of the Islamic faith, so that I now better understand its attraction to my son and others like him who have been or are incarcerated.

Chapter One

Introduction to Conversion Saga — Why Conversion to Islam?

Scholars have argued that within the prison system conversion from one faith to another provide the converts an opportunity to embrace a faith base group that meet their needs in order to feel a sense of belonging and self-worth. Presently, the US correctional institutions have more than 2.3 million inmates and about one-third of these inmates claim to belong to one form of religion or another (Dammer, 2002a, p. 1375). A number of studies have shown that many inmates begin their incarceration with little or no religious calling, but adopt a faith during their imprisonment (Clear & Sumter, 2002; Thomas & Zaitzow, 2004). This study, however, is about African American inmates who had been Christians before incarceration, but converted, or, to borrow a word from Hamm, radicalized to a different religion while in prison. Hamm, a Professor of Criminology, had observed in a study that American prisoners were being radicalized to religions outside the Judeo-Christian mainstream (Hamm, 2008, pp. 14-15). The objective of this study is to explore the reasons why incarcerated African American men with Christian backgrounds are converting to Islamism.

Religion is fundamental to the life of an African American. Vu (2009), a writer for *The Christian Post*, had reported in her article "African-Americans Most Religiously Devout Group," that "African-Americans are the most religiously devout racial group in the nation when it comes to attending services, praying and believing that God exists" (para. 1). Vu concluded that "compared to the rest of the U.S. population, which is generally considered highly religious, African-Americans engage in religious activities

more frequently and express higher levels of religious belief" (para 2). African Americans remain committed to their religious groups even in times of crisis.

Drawing upon the experiences of incarcerated Christian African American men in four South Carolina prisons—Lee Correctional Institution, Lieber Correctional Institution, McCormick Correctional Institution, and Manning Correctional Institution—this research documented reasons for their conversion to Islam. It also examined the perceptions they had of both Islamism and Christianity in promoting Black self-sufficiency and autonomy in American society as well as their opinions on the spiritual importance of each religion in their lives. Finally, the responses were analyzed.

Statement of the Problem

One trend that has become evident and is the basis of this study is that when African American men are incarcerated, many consider rejecting Christianity and embracing Islam. Sherman A. Jackson (2005), Professor of Afro-American Studies and author of *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection,* insists that no one had offered a convincing explanation yet as to why Islam had continued to spread among African Americans. To understand this trend among incarcerated African American men, one may have to explore the concept of religious conversion, which is, indeed, a fascinating subject (p. 18). Scholars have examined and diagnosed various aspects of religious conversion which has greatly contributed to its understanding. The issue of conversion by African American inmates from Christianity to Islam has not been adequately addressed. (Terms are defined in Appendix A.)

This study explores the reasons articulated by incarcerated African American men that explain why they convert to Islam. Some scholars assert that such men convert for

the following three reasons: Islamic practices allow for personal mentoring (C. F. Ellis, Jr., personal communication, December 2, 2008); these men consider Islamic conversion to be the reclamation of their ancestral faith (M. Ibn-Ziyad, personal communication, August 16, 2006); and Islamic teachings focus on self-esteem, discipline, and respect (Dannin, 2002, p. 169).

For his doctoral thesis in the School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University—"*Embracing Islam: Conversion Narratives of American Muslims Living in Southern California*"—Morton (2004) interviewed 15 non-incarcerated, adult, American-born Christians who had converted to Islam. His goal was to learn the motivating factors that had led them to make that choice. Morton's key findings are (1) that the conversion narratives revealed in the interviewees "the development of identity as an American Muslim with a corresponding worldview" and (2) that the conversion stories themselves suggest "a possible model of conversion to Islam among American-born Christian," in addition to manifesting "three themes or motifs: wandering (moratorium), discovery (transition), and fulfillment (self-actualization) " (para. 1).

Although Morton's interviewees were not among the prison population, his work is still applicable to the current study because it discusses the process of conversion and the evolutionary stages to conversion. Moreover, a report "From the Inside Out: Coming Home from Prison to the Islamic Faith" (2003), prepared by Read, an assistant professor of sociology, and Dohadwala, a sociology graduate of Rice University and medical student at Johns Hopkins University, explains that growing numbers of African Americans are, in fact, converting to Islam while they are in American prisons. "Since Islam is often described as a way of life and a religion of the mind," Read and Dohadwala

assert, "individuals tend to convert based on rational information rather than spiritual awakening. As a result, many *da'wah* programs . . . offer religious classes that teach prisoners how to live according to Islamic tenets and become a productive human being." In these Islamic prison programs, good works are stressed: "For orthodox Muslims, the religious concept of *da'wah* motivates them to engage in good works. *Da'wah* is an Arabic term that means 'call' or 'an invitation to Islam'" (pp. 3– 4).

Many of the activities in prison *da'wah* programs focus on making connections between individuals, families, and the community. The Islamic faith considers the family as its central institution and places a high value on family stability. Accordingly, many of the Islamic organizations work to develop social networks that heal and strengthen family ties as a way to assist prisoners to successfully re-enter community life. They accomplish this through education, correspondence with prisoners, re-entry support groups, family counseling, halfway houses, and toll-free numbers to facilitate ex-prisoners staying in touch with Islamic organizations.

The survey questionnaire Burgess Survey of Religious Conversion (BSRC) for this study incorporates the understandings introduced by the above-mentioned scholars as they alluded to the connection between Islamic conversion and the needs of African American men for self-fulfillment, self-esteem, personal identity, and participation in current and future community development. The research questions are designed to explore the social, psychological, and theological reasons why incarcerated African American men in four South Carolina prisons converted to Islam while imprisoned.

Eighty-two respondents in the four South Carolina prisons willingly volunteered to share their conversion experiences. The researcher asked these men to complete a

brief survey containing two parts: (1) a demographic section requesting general information about their families, their previous church affiliation, and the length of their sentences; and (2) a set of twenty statements and one open-ended question developed to allow them to explain their reasons for making their particular religious choice.

Statement of the Purpose

The study investigates the reasons for conversion from Christianity to Islam among incarcerated African American men in four South Carolina correctional facilities. Three dominant research questions govern this study:

1. What social factors (relationship within the community, prison, external, and sub-cultural affiliation) encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

2. What psychological factors (ethnicity, history of religious belief, behavior, self-discipline, and moral and ethical principles) encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

3. What theological factors (doctrine) encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

These questions attempt to ascertain the critical components of the respondents' spiritual and religious conversions. The Burgess Survey of Religious Conversion (BSRC) (Appendix B) was designed to identify the strength of certain factors—social, psychological, and theological influencing conversion among the sample.

The BSRC is distinct in that it focuses particularly on the conversion from Christianity to Islam. The BSRC is comprised of two parts: the first, a background information section requesting general information about the family, previous church

affiliation (Baptist, Methodist, etc.), and length of sentence. Included in the BSRC is a qualitative component (statement 12), which gave the prisoners an opportunity to express themselves freely: "Please write below anything you would like to say about your conversion" (see Appendix B). Many of the incarcerated men wrote that they converted to Islam because it is a true religion, and it offered them a better way of life. The second part contains statements developed to explain reasons to change an individual's preferred religious choice.

Research Questions

Questions that led to establishing the critical components of conversion included what led to the conversion, what were the elements and stages of the change, what was the process these men went through as they converted, and, finally, what were the consequences of the conversion. Responses to the research questions produced the data which addressed social, psychological, and theological factors which influenced this group of incarcerated African American male respondents to convert to Islam. This study also examines religious conversion as postulated by various scholars who studied the conversion phenomenon, such as Loveland (2003) and Lumumba (2003). Loveland, a sociologist of religion, explains how religious choices are developed, maintained, and altered (pp. 147-157). Lumumba, counselor at the Counseling Enterprise, Incorporation, refers to the impact Islam has made on the African American population prompting "self-esteem, self-worth, and self-reliance" (p. 211). Furthermore, Zeya (1990a), writing "Islam in America," a program coordinator for the American Educational Trust, specializing in Islamic affairs, focuses on the aspects of how those who practice Islam have the ability to attract new converts (p. 42), and Larson (2005), professor of Muslim

Studies and Intercultural Studies, Columbia Biblical Seminary and School of Missions, addresses the Christian response to Islamic conversion among converts in America today (pp. 48-55).

Scholars Discuss Why People Convert

Most people remain adherents of one religious faith throughout their lifetimes, so one may well ask why such a large number of African American men change from Christianity to Islam during the time they were incarcerated. First, there are studies that view the social factors as a component of the process of religious conversion. Nearly one third of American adults change religions at some time during their lives. Scholars have long questioned why people change their religious identification. Some argue that the religions people change to present psychological improvement, and overcome social and economic injustice (Bainbridge, 1992; Dannin, 2002; Gillespie, 1991; Häring, 1970; Loveland, 2003; Lumumba, 2003; Rambo & Farhadian, 1999; Woodberry, Shubin, & Marks, 2007). Therefore, the major issues investigated by the various scholars were the following: what led to or caused the conversion, what were some of the characteristics of the event itself, and what were its consequences?

Social, psychological, and theological factors cause an individual to convert from one set of religious beliefs to another; these factors have long been of interest to scholars. Some scholars consider, for example, which personality types are more likely to experience conversions and what impact these conversions have on people's personalities and psychological well-being (Bainbridge, 1992; Gillespie, 1991). Still others look at the effects of various factors in life that trigger a conversion experience, such as drug addiction, drug dealing, and involvement in violent crimes (rape, homicide, and assault).

These crises are prominent in the lives of many African Americans and are devastating to African American family life. These trigger factors undermine African American communities' development and growth. Other disruptive and destructive factors include poor educational opportunities, unemployment, the inability to accrue wealth and to achieve dignity, happiness, personal change (internal and external), and self-esteem (James, 2002; Leone, 2004; Lumumba, 2003). The conversion process can also be explored, as Bainbridge suggests, by considering control theory. According to this social influence theory, an individual will follow the status quo as long as s/he is strongly connected to friends, has a traditional career, and lives an ordinary life. However, when conventional social bonds are severed, Bainbridge asserts, "...persons most likely to convert to a new religious affiliation are those who have lost connectedness...or persons experiencing any other major life disruption whether negative or positive in character" (1992, p. 182). For many African Americans, this is indeed what has happened; they are experiencing a disconnectedness which leads them to consider conversion. Although Gillespie (1991), a noted author of religious conversion, does not define marginalization in his book *The Dynamics of Religious Conversion*, he introduces the process of the men's marginalization by discussing reasons for conversion when one is disconnected or disenfranchised from society. "Research [of the conversion process] does seem to suggest that certain types who are more easily swayed by an outside influence may have changed more often," claims Gillespie (p. 112).

Erickson (1985), a Christian theologian, professor of theology, and author, asserted, "Conversion refers to the response of the human being to God's offer of salvation and approach to man. Regeneration is the other side of conversion. It is God's

doing" (p. 942). In other words, Smith, (2001), teacher of spiritual theology and author of the book *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation,* points out that for a Christian, there is a theological reason for conversion—a reason such as the acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God (heart knowledge), a change of heart, development of faith, forgiveness, love, repentance, and transformation (p. 16). Furthermore, Sproul (1998) in his book *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* expounds on the Christian doctrine that deals with faith and the belief system of Christianity that one should know (p. 183).

People also convert because they are inculcated (to impress on somebody's mind; to fix something firmly) with the preached word that seems relevant to their lives. Häring (1970), theologian, teacher of moral theology, and author of *A Theology of Protest.* asserts that Christianity, as the self-described "religion of love cannot preach eternal salvation without regard for the well-being of all [people], since the hope of salvation transcends the horizons of this earthly life and encompasses the whole [person]. Its purpose is to heal [them] and [their] environment, i.e., the world in relation to [people], but this depends on the full cooperation of the redeemed with the grace of God" (pp. 5–6).

Limitations of the Study

This study presents a discussion of the social, psychological, and theological explanations of why incarcerated African American men with Christian backgrounds convert to Islam. The target population for this study is limited to African American men incarcerated in four South Carolina prisons. The study is limited to include only African American men between the ages of 18 and 50 who converted to Islam while in prison.

The questionnaire used did not include a designation of having no children within the demographic items; however, participants were instructed to omit a response on any item not specifically related to them. Examples given were: (1) the researcher informed the participants that those having no children should omit or not respond to the given item concerning the number of children and (2) those having children above the age range should either indicate ages or omit the question. The BSRC is also a limitation because it is newly developed to obtain data for this study. To construct all statements/questions in the BSRC, the researcher used secondary data. Some of the topics that the researcher has explored are prison-life experiences, the various religious choices of incarcerated African American men, and the various patterns of conversion. The delimitation of this study is that it cannot be generalized to other prisons or ethnicities or to females.

Social Significance of the Study

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Max Weber (1958) argued that religion, as a representation of an idea, can be a force for social change. He explained that the dominant religious factor (Protestantism, a branch of Christianity) which ushered in social change allowed for the accumulation of wealth and development of capitalism as an economic system (pp. 35-78). The social change described by Weber produces a set of economic, social, and political relationships that are grounded in capitalist exploitation and justified by Protestant ideology. It is within this context that African American males with a history of racism and discrimination live out their lives.

Some African American men have struggled to develop a meaningful and productive life in contemporary US society and have, for various reasons, failed. The men often end up in prison where they meet Islamist proselytizers who introduce them to

Islam. This study presents a critical examination of the reasons for conversion to Islam among a select population of South Carolina's incarcerated African American men from Christian backgrounds. It points to the need to understand that conversions take place in different socioeconomic and political contexts for different reasons. They can happen due to dissatisfaction with one's own religion, life-changing experiences, or trigger events which force conversion to Islam. This study may be instrumental in helping the African American church to understand the reasons why so many African American men with Christian backgrounds convert in prison, leaving their Christian faith.

The work of W. E. B. DuBois may also shed light on the plight of African Americans. DuBois, an American civil rights activist, sociologist, and historian, authored *The Souls of Black Folk* (2004), a book of essays which makes clear the entanglements African Americans must wade through as they deal with the social construction of themselves that is grounded in hyperracism, exploitation, and oppression. The book concentrates on the psychological and expressive aspects of Black culture. The entire work attempts to probe the Black American mind. Blacks, who are prevented by the repressive white culture from ever possessing "true self-consciousness," can see themselves only as whites see them. DuBois makes the following assertions:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

In this statement, DuBois presents the crisis many African Americans must confront; he introduces the reason why, given what Islam is said to offer, many convert as they deconstruct their old selves and invent new, more worthy, loving selves.

Many African Americans, especially inmates, may indeed experience this duality which DuBois describes as they grapple with embracing a new religion. According to Read and Dohadwala, who investigate the impact of diversity within Islam on programs to rehabilitate prisoners, these incarcerated participants are not original Muslims and have never lived in a Muslim culture, yet by converting, they are adopting a Muslim cultural identity, as well as a Muslim religious identity (2003, pp. 10-11). In this study, the results allude to these incarcerated African American males wanting to leave their Christian affiliation, which many begin to negatively associate with the White culture, to embrace Islam, which celebrates their rich heritage.

This study provides information about strategies used by Islamists as they reach out to African American men who have become disconnected and disenfranchised. These Islamists posit the importance of creating movements and organizations that help incarcerated African American men develop "a new sense of personal empowerment; a rigorous call to discipline; an emphasis on family structure and values; and a clear standard of moral behavior" (Armstrong, 2003, p. 19).

Furthermore, this study identifies the ideology of one major sect (Sunni Islam) and of one organization (the Nation of Islam) and their strategies for attracting African American incarcerated men. Warith Deen Muhammad, a revivalist, was instrumental in the great transformation of the Black Muslims, who helped point the unchurched African Americans to the orthodox belief system. "Despite their (revivalists) lingering hatred for

Elijah Muhammad and his heretical doctrines, they patiently instructed many former Nation of Islam adepts in the *sunna*" (Dannin, 2002, p. 73). Moreover, according to the Sunni tradition, the "Ash'ariyyah theology stresses divine revelation over human reason. Ethics, they say, cannot be derived from human reason: God's commands, as revealed in the Qur'an and the practice of Muhammad and his companions (the sunnah, as recorded in the traditions, or hadith), are the source of all morality" (Ali, 1968, p. 177). Sunnis believe that anyone who is morally adequate can be placed in leadership (caliphate) positions. Good leaders follow tradition, and they promote methods of rehabilitation.

Rose-Marie Armstrong (2003), a freelance writer and development consultant, writes in her article "Turning to Islam—African-American Conversion Stories" about an interview with a convert. Butt, an interviewee, acknowledges "the empowerment, stability and privileges Islam brings to African-Americans and their communities: 'I see men who are redeemed from prison and drugs, who are off the streets and running their own businesses, who are neat and clean. They even have a new name!'" (pp. 19–23).

Similarly, respondents from four South Carolina prisons comment that in Islam, African Americans are encouraged to return to their true religion and to restore themselves to their proper place as Allah's chosen people. The Nation of Islam encourages inmates to reconnect with their ancestors; their focus should be on African American supremacy and nationalism.

Many scholars have found reasons why African American men are attracted to Sunni and Nation of Islam beliefs and practices, such as (a) the nature of the problems leading to conversion, (b) the social ramifications of the conversions, and (c) the end results of their conversion experience. In addition, these data may help the Black

evangelical churches see where they fit into the landscape of religious rehabilitation within the prison system.

This study specifically addresses African American men between the ages of 18 and 50 who converted from Christianity to Islam while incarcerated at four South Carolina prisons. It is unique because the study is a ground-breaking attempt to explore the dynamics of why this particular population changed their system of religious beliefs. There are many who have studied conversion, but no one has collected first-hand ethnographies from this specific population—African American men across four South Carolina prisons who are from Christian backgrounds but who, once incarcerated, become Muslims. This study should influence and help people to be better equipped to revisit the organizational landscape of prison outreach programs. It also should help practitioners of rehabilitation to promote programs for prisoners that (a) enhance social networks among the incarcerated, ex-prisoners, families, and communities; (b) provide economic strategies for the prisoners and their families during the incarceration period and later; and (c) strengthen faith-based organizations to foster leadership within the community.

Format of the Dissertation

Chapter One provides information regarding the importance of religion and its conversion process. Religion is a fundamental aspect of life for most African Americans (Vu, 2009, para 1). Chapter Two provides a critical review of existing literature on conversion to Islam. It introduces religious conversion steps and stages, as well as historical facts that expound on the conversion processes of enslaved African Muslims to Christianity and African Americans from Christianity to Islam. It also examines the

effect of practices of both of these religions in promoting Black self-sufficiency. Chapter Three discusses the research method used to conduct the study and the specific procedures implemented. Chapter Four presents the analyses and findings. Chapter Five discusses the results of the research. Chapter Six concludes the study with a summary, implications, validity of the Burgess Survey of Religious Conversion (BSRC), conclusions and recommendations for further study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Today, the body of religious conversion literature is enormous. Scholars have examined and diagnosed various aspects of religious conversion which has greatly contributed to its understanding. This literature review presents relevant information regarding the conversion of African American inmates from Christianity to Islam. This review would be incomplete, however, without a brief consideration of the concept of religious conversion, particularly the religious conversion experience of African Americans. The issue of conversion by African American inmates from Christianity to Islam has not been adequately addressed. Moreover, Sherman A. Jackson (2005), Professor of Afro-American Studies and author of *Islam and the Blackamerican : Looking Toward the Third Resurrection,* argues that no one has offered a convincing explanation of why Islam continues to spread among African Americans. This review of the literature has helped to explicate the various factors necessary for understanding this essential issue. I have broadly surveyed the literature of religious conversion, and I have presented the ideas of leading theorists and researchers. Moreover, in my survey of the literature, I have determined that there are three chief focal areas: (a) social, (b) psychological, and (c) theological.

Furthermore, this study has been ground-breaking in its exploration of the reasons for conversion from Judeo-Christian faiths to Islam among incarcerated African American males within four South Carolina prisons who made that transition while there.

The researcher found that such a study has not been conducted within the south or north eastern part of the United States. Imam Omar Shaheed, the regional chaplain of South Carolina, asserted that such an investigation has not been done within the prisons there (personal communication, September 27, 2011). Chief regional chaplain, Oliver Muhammad, asserted that this study was unique and that no one had researched this topic within the state of North Carolina (personal communication, September 28, 2011). In addition, Horne, director of chaplains within the prisons of Georgia, replied that such research had not been done in his state, in a recent email (horned00@dcor.state.ga.us).

The Concept of Religious Conversion

Religious conversion is, no doubt, a fascinating subject. Religious conversion is not simply coming to a religion; instead, most scholars indicate that religious conversion is more about coming to a sense of self. Woodberry's (1992) research entitled "Conversion in Islam" explains the understanding of conversion as "surrendering to God, faith in God, and following God" (p. 22). The concept of conversion is also described by how it occurs, what it brings, and the steps it takes (Leone, 2004; Ullman, 1989). Armstrong (2003) asserts that conversion takes place through a psychological component in which one seeks empowerment and self-determination (p. 19). On the other hand, other scholars make a socio-psychological argument implying that conversion takes place on the basis of one's self identity and, also, deals with the belief and social structure which entails both faith and affiliation (Gillespie, 1991; Helms, 1990). Ultimately, it is a phenomenon that is controversial, difficult, and challenging to classify.

One trend that has become evident is that when African American men are incarcerated, many consider rejecting Christianity and embracing Islam. To understand

this trend among incarcerated African American men, one must explore the concept of religious conversion which is indeed a fascinating subject. Ullman (1989) proposes that religious conversion is not simply a change, but a self-transformation that results in one experiencing "a sense of 'giving up,' of passive 'self-surrender,' and a newness of life, as surrendering itself; as becoming new; as a transformed self" (pp. 145, 172-173). Furthermore, says Howard University's professor, Sulayman Nyang, a Gambian immigrant, "Many Blacks see Islam as a cultural weapon in the struggle against racism, and as a return to ancestral faith" (personal communication, October 13, 2007).

Abdur - Rashid Taveras, age 22, a recent convert, asserts in an interview that "most converts are young men in their early 20s, seeking spiritual remedies to moral and religious confusion, racial inequality, and the violent uncertainties of inner-city life. Black converts say Islam provides clear direction, discipline, conservative family values and intellectual encouragement. 'It's not just a religion. It's a way of life" (Frankel, 1994, para. 4). Stone reaffirms the qualities that converts such as Taveras find attractive: "...most Muslims are conservative on social issues, opposing abortion, premarital sex, homosexuality and divorce. They support school prayer. Many avoid alcohol, dating or dancing" (1994, para 8).

Smith (2001) asserts from Paul Helm's report that religious conversion is a process that involves more than just the individual; it is divinely initiated. According to Smith, in his book *The Beginnings: Word and Spirit in Conversion*, Helm (1986) also examines the characteristics of authentic conversion and stresses that a Christian conversion comes in response to divine initiative. "Thus, he contends, it is a gift of new life that occurs deep within the human psyche, 'below the level of self awareness.' Yet

Helm also insists that this gift gives rise to 'an experience with a distinctive structure' and that 'the experiences of conversion are infinitely varied, but they all have the same structure.'" The varied experiences, while different for different people, have all emanated from a similar structure in the psyche. In other words, "The elements of the experience are the same" (p. 136).

Gillespie (1991) contends in his book *The Dynamics of Religious Conversion: Identity and Transformation* that religious conversion is that spiritual encounter equated with the experience alluded to by Jesus of Nazareth in his evening answer to Nicodemus regarding his authority: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, King James Version, 2002, p. 863). Gillespie asserts that conversion is also most commonly understood to be a dramatic religious experience. Undoubtedly, the emotionalism usually attributed to this event has caused it to be so central in most studies of religious experience (p. 3). He adds, "Writers concerned with the psychology of religious conversion see that the experience does not just happen; it seems caused. Persons are not struck outside their own situation, and, therefore, it would seem that understanding the psychological and social dynamics involved with religious conversion would aid immensely in understanding the relationship with identity" (p. 76). Gillespie acknowledges that conversion is not solely an intimate experience but one grounded in and influenced by the social and psychological experiences of the converted. From the above analysis, various contexts exist which seem to enhance the possibility of conversion and may be significant in its occurrence.

Foremost, religious conversion is a controversial process. Leone (2004) describes this phenomenon in his book *Religious Conversion and Identity: The Semiotic Analysis of Texts* in this way: "Those who change are usually seen as enemies, but before becoming enemies to other people, in the most critical moment of their conversion, they paradoxically become enemies to themselves" (p. 62). He contends also that conversion and controversy are elements that "[endanger] the *social* identity of a person" (p. 62). Leone asserts that "in religious conversion, as soon as one comes to believe in a certain religious denomination, going back to a state of disbelief, or embracing a different faith, is very problematic" (p. 73).

In addition to being a difficult process, religious conversion, according to most scholars, is about self, the identity of one's self, and self-worth (Gillespie, 1991, p. 154; Ullman, 1989, pp.161-166). Leone, for instance, describes religious conversion as a challenge to one's social identity. The challenges of conversion actually break one's belonging or attachment to a given religious community. For some, it is tantamount to a form of treason. Leone places the process as one between the converter and the community (pp. 52, 62-64). Gillespie (1991), in his exploration of the conversion process, discusses the perspectives of both Lonergan and Price. He notes that Lonergan (1980) argues that a transformative development occurs where challenge and change are essential to coming to a better sense of self. According to Gillespie, Lonergan asserts that "conversion [offers] the capacity for self-transcendence.... During the moments of conversion, there is religious self-transcendence called, ...worldly falling in love. Conversion has a threefold psychological result. ... it includes the attainment of intellectual, moral, and religious self-transcendence. When converted, the person will be

in an otherworldly love-state and oriented to the mystery of the transcendent deity" (p. 124).

Mainly, Lonergan (1972) suggests that this stage, self-transcendence of conversion is one where the individual "falls-in-love" with himself or desires a self-centered love to loving others. This type of love or being in love is evident in findings that incarcerated African American males in four South Carolina prisons develop or seek when they convert from Christianity to Islam.

However, Conn's book *Christian Conversion: Development and Theological Reflections on Young Thomas Merton* (1983) points out that life is not centered around an individual's loving himself/herself and/or self-centered love to loving others as Lonergan suggests. Because of the crisis situations one might face, incarceration for violent criminal acts, pain of being disconnected from families and friends, and religious affiliation involvement, all of these experiences are imbedded in the memories of the incarcerated converter, pointing to rejection of his traditional religious belief (pp. 26-27). Yet, in this research, these incarcerated participants are finding tranquility within their conversion experiences to Islam.

Another author who addresses Lonergan's theory is Hudson. In his article "The Catholic View of Conversion," Hudson (1992) points out additional factors of Lonergan's work regarding the conversion process. He notes:

> Lonergan (1978) proposed that the renewal of theology itself could result from a systematic reflection upon conversion; the phenomenon of conversion should become the starting point of an empirical approach to theology. Since conversion is one of the fundamental facts of a religious

life, Lonergan argued, 'It follows that reflection on conversion can supply theology with its foundation and, indeed, with a foundation that is concrete, dynamic, personal, communal, and historical. (p. 115)

Lonergan argued that there are relevant theological and psychological elements within the conversion process, not theological factors only. The result of the survey used to answer reasons for conversion poses that social factors are the foundation of conversion for incarcerated participants who converted from Christianity to Islam. Ullman (1989), author of "*The Transformed Self: The Psychology of Religious Conversion,*" argues that religious conversion should be examined primarily from the point of view of the psychology of the self.

Ullman asserts that "[her] aim is to elucidate the experience of religious conversion as a change in the self and to raise suggestions for the study of the self that derive from the data on religious conversion" (p. vii). Finally, religious conversion, according to Gillespie (1991), impacts the self in that it provides the following:

1) a unifying quality for self, which includes self-integration, wholeness, and possible reorganization and integration; 2) a positive behavior; 3) an intensity of commitment to an ideology, usually thought of as occurring within the Christian tradition as a confrontation with ultimates [*sic*] but many include change with any subjective religious quality; 4) a decisive 'change or returning to' brought on suddenly or gradually, seen as either instantaneous or incubational; 5) a sense of belonging or understanding of personal identity itself. The 'triggers of change' may be influenced by

personality, gender difference, environment, mystical experience, or practical (pedagogical) influences. (pp. 64-65)

Gillespie (1991) identifies another dynamic of religious conversion, and that is people seeking to identify who they are. "Throughout history people have asked some form of the following questions: 'Who am I?' 'Where do I belong?' and 'How do I fit?' Times when these questions surface include moments of swift change, social dislocation, or cultural upheaval. These periods of change are present as periods of 'dissolution or of new birth according to the particular view of individual values and historical sequences from which they are interpreted" he notes (p. 132). Furthermore, Gillespie suggests that "how one answers the questions of personal identity may have more to do with how well one understands the society, culture, and perception of the world in which one lives" (p. 133). Gillespie's ideology of why people convert to a different religious belief system on the basis of seeking to identify who they are is relevant to this research as the learner explores the reasons that African American men are converting from Christianity to Islam.

Leading researchers' theories differ regarding the motivation which leads to conversion. For Gillespie, conversion is a means to find one's identity. To Ullman and Lonergan, it is the love among the groups which entices individuals to convert. Furthermore, leading researchers focus on various situations one might experience to embrace a new found belief, which lead an individual to religious conversion, such as through controversy, seeking self and identity of one's self, and transforming because of conflict and tensions among individuals, and falling in love with his/her new found faith belief (Gillespie, 1991; Leone, 2004; Lonergan & Climacus, 1980).

Religious Practices and Conversion

Religious practices are another component to explore when investigating reasons for conversion. Winchester's (2008) article "Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus" describes from a theoretical concept how a group of adult Muslim converts in Missouri developed in their religious practices, personal identity, and moral selfhood. Winchester proposes how religious practices are important factors pointing to the moral obligations of the converter. "This research demonstrates how, through a qualitative reorganization of the social actor's embodied relationship to everyday space and time, religious practices created a new *moral habitus*—that is, a thoroughly embodied and practical form of moral subjectivity" (p. 1755). Winchester reports that Ortner (2005) in her article "Subjectivity and Cultural Critique" defines the term "subjectivity" as "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so forth, that animate acting subject" (p. 31). Furthermore, Winchester contends that these religious practices are "as ritual prayer (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*), and covering (*hijab*) effectively produced within converts the moral dispositions associated with becoming a 'good Muslim'" (p. 1755). While little work has been done in regard to religious practices and moral selfhood, from Winchester's view, "two anthropologists —Talal Asad (1993) and Saba Mahmood (2005) have shed significant light on the central role of embodied religious practices in the making of moral selves" (p. 1756). Winchester asserts that "while Asad and Mahmood may not be familiar names in the sociology of religion, these two theorists explore the central question: What is the relationship between embodied religious practice and moral selfhood? Moreover, both make compelling arguments that religious practices are central to the constitution of

a moral self and produce changes in moral subjectivity that cannot be reduced to some other phenomenon (e.g., universal moral reason, doctrines, symbol systems, etc.)" (p. 1756).

For many, religious conversion, influenced by religious practices, changes the purpose and meaning of life. The decision to change forms the fabric in which all of life is now viewed. The mission is clarified, and one's place in the grand scheme of things is identified. To Ullman, "...conversion [refers] to an abrupt religious experience involving an increased commitment within the framework of the person's own religious group.... Conversion of this type involves the most easily discernible changes in beliefs and attitudes. The changes are not only in degree of commitment but also in the content of the new beliefs the person adopts" (p. 5). Furthermore, for the religious converts Ullman interviewed, the actual conversion experience focused on "newly found protection, attention, and acceptance by another or by a group of others, which rendered superfluous and unnecessary an examination of the beliefs or action involved" (pp. 20-21). This process of religious conversion eventually brings a person to a point at which he/she is willing to surrender to God.

Religious Conversion: The Steps and Stages

Religious conversion takes place in many steps and stages, whether it is through social, psychological, or theological dimensions of a conversion event or journey. For the purpose of this study, the work of five major scholars who have investigated/studied the conversion process will be explored. Connected with the social aspects of conversion are Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001). Fowler (1981) and Gillespie (1991) emphasize the

psychological facets of conversion. Finally, Rambo and Farhadian (1999) have researched the conversion experience from a theological point of view.

One social aspect of the conversion process involves an individual's identity. Various social theories involve the study of Black identity development and change, especially at the adult level. Scholars have recognized the importance of adult identity during conversion experiences. Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) explain in their article "Patterns of African American Identity Development: A Life Span Perspective" that the "Nigrescence Theory involves the study of Black identity development and change, especially at the adult level" (p. 244). Cross and Fhagen-Smith point out in their study that there are five stages of the adult identity conversion process:

> Stage One, *Pre-Encounter,* outlines the ongoing and stable identity that will eventually be the object of the metamorphosis; Stage Two, *Encounter*, depicts the event or series of events that challenge and destabilize the ongoing identity; Stage Three, *Immersion-Emersion*, frames the simultaneous struggle to bring to the surface and destroy the moorings of the old identity, while decoding the nature and demands of the identity; and, given that regression or stagnation are avoided, *Internalization*, the Fourth Stage, signals the habituation, stabilization, and finalization of the new sense of self. Stage Five, *Internalization-Commitment*, describes a person who, after having achieved a strong Black identity at the *personal* level, joins with others in the community for long-term struggles to solve Black problems and to research, protect, and propagate Black history and culture. (p. 244)

An awareness of the stages of adult identity enhances an understanding of the conversion process among incarcerated African American males. This study examines the processes that contribute to conversion on the basis of racist attitudes, racial identity development and race salience. This analysis of racial identity fosters an understanding of the range of views that Black people hold about their Blackness and answers a question essential to Cross and Fhagen-Smith's research: What role does racial identity play in one converting from one religious practice to another?

While Cross and Fhagen-Smith investigated a social component of the conversion process, Fowler (1981) in his book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning,* addresses the psychological implications of conversion by focusing on the process of moving from the individualism that all Americans are taught to embrace to becoming a member of a group. His study explores the following six stages of faith:

> Stage 1 Intuitive-Projective faith is the...imitative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the visible faith of primally related adults (p. 133). Stage 2 Mythic-Literal faith is the stage in which the person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community (p. 149). Stage 3 Synthetic-Conventional faith, a person's experience of the world now extends beyond the family....Faith must synthesize values and information; it must provide a basis for identity and outlook (p. 172). Stage 4 Individualize-Reflective faith is particularly critical for it is in this transition that the late

> adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes (p. 182). Stage 5 Conjunctive faith involves the integration into self and outlook of much that was suppressed or unrecognized in the interest of Stage 4's self-certainty and conscious cognitive and affective adaptation to reality (p. 197). Stage 6 Universalizing faith is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. (p.200)

At the beginning of this journey to convert, internal conflict abounds because a person is forced to make a decision as to whether to remain an individual or define him or herself as being a part of a group or group membership. The psychological stressors associated with this decision have a powerful effect on inmates who are considering converting from Christianity to Islam.

Psychologically, Gillespie (1991) focuses in his book *The Dynamics of Religious Conversion: Identity and Transformation* on the development of self-identity and personal transformation which occurs in the conversion process. Gillespie contends that "religious conversion can be a change from Roman Catholicism to Buddhism, a shift in beliefs without a church, or a lesser degree of change by situation, such as marriage or citizenship" (p. 14). This change is based upon the experience of conversion regardless of the religious elements. There are five basic stages of the conversion process:

1. *Tradition type Transition* "[happens] when someone leaves one major religious tradition for another, such as in conversions from Islam to Buddhism or when they occur within a framework of the tradition itself. These changes can be typified as changes in worldview rather than personal orientation and self-transcendent experiences. Gillespie views Gration's ideology that "transition of this type can be painful and may yield to some form of syncretism (p. 14).
2. *Institutional Transitions* involve a conversion from one belief system or community to another within the same tradition.
3. *Affiliation* is understood as a movement from no commitment to a nominal or strong commitment. We might illustrate this form of conversional change by looking at a Baptist university student who joins the Unification Church. This movement is often away from more conventional religion.
4. *Defection* [is not defined] is stated as the fourth basic type of mold. According to the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, this term means "the lack of something necessary or desirable for completion or perfection" (p. 363). Moreover, Gillespie views religious conversion as "a profound transformational change in the whole personality and orientation of an individual, a change which leads the person to a fundamentally new identity as a human being" (back of the cover of V. Bailey Gillespie's book).
5. *Intensification* is the "revitalization of the commitment to a religious body. Born-again conversions are usually intensifications" (p. 15). Gillespie supports Gration theory of "conversion never occurs in a vacuum and

therefore must be a social phenomenon" (pp. 157-162). He claims people regularly change their allegiance, their beliefs and ideologies. This shift in loyalty and movement from *no* belief to *some* belief (p. 15).

An analysis of Gillespie's stages of conversion reveals a broad spectrum of events that qualify as conversion experiences. As emphasized in his work, he contends that one who converts experiences a personal transformation. He places religious conversion on the basis of personality development, identity, and personal growth. Gillespie describes conversion also as shift into a "rich type of identity experience providing ideology, fit, purpose, and worldview" (p. 1). Ultimately, a significant correlation exists between the stages of conversion that Gillespie proposes and the conversion experiences of one who converts to a different religious view.

One important theme within Gillespie's five stages illustrates that religious conversion is a transformation from conflict. He also addresses another concept: tensions. Gillespie's ideas concerning tensions are that people assume something is missing in their lives, and they then move into a problem-solving stage. Gillespie contends that both personal developmental crises and unconscious experience may play a role in this tension, but regardless of the immediate cause, at the end of the incubation period, a point of realization seems to occur when commitment to God appears to be the only way out. A man experiences tension in prison when he encounters violence, humiliation, and sexual abuse. Through conversion to Islam, the tension is reduced (pp. 90, 93).

My assessment of Fowler's and Gillespie's views has focused on their works which identify the steps and stages that one might take to convert from one religion to

another on the basis of their affiliation, faith, and self identity. These scholars argue that spiritual transformation occurs in steps and stages. The psychological component focuses on one converting because of dramatic situations, gradually or a longer period of time. The research of both suggests that change occurs within the context of faith, the development of faith known as structural faith, and the value and power in one's life structure (Fowler, 2001, p. 163).

Theological Aspects of Conversion

Theologians assert that conversion does not happen suddenly. There are steps and stages for an individual to change their Christian belief system to embrace Islam. Rambo's book *Understanding Religious Conversion* (1993) indicates that "...conversion is a process over time, not a single event" (p. 5). He also notes that conversion could take place on the basis of influences on an individual who is in a crisis situation. Rambo asserts that "there is no one cause of conversion, no one process, and no one simple consequence of that process" (p. 5). For Rambo there are seven stages of conversion:

> **Stage 1: Context** conversion process points to the environment of an individual. Context deals with various components that one might convert which could be their setting, their culture, their personal and religious orientation. The setting is a component that focuses on the individual "...family, friends, ethnic group, religious community, and neighborhood. These immediate influences play an important role in the creation of a sense of identity and belonging and in shaping a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions" (p. 23). Rambo acknowledges Anthony F. C. Wallace's ideology that defines the conversion process dealing with

culture. He states that culture is a way of life, belief system and how they view themselves. For personal context conversion process "shapes a person's myths, rituals, symbols, and beliefs; it also has a powerful impact in terms of access, mobility, and the opportunity for coming into contact with new religious influences" (pp. 264-281). The final context conversion process is religious. It is the "quest for the sacred and the experience of the holy, the yearning for transcendence, and the human desire for interaction with the supernatural.... The religious sphere, like the culture, social, and personal spheres, is a vital and complex dimension of the dynamic force field in which conversion takes place " (pp. 22-32).

Stage 2: Crisis conversion process notes an individual converting because of situation(s). The crisis may be religious, political, psychological, or cultural in origin. The crisis conversion process is described in three components: nature of crisis (could be dramatic or less dramatic); relative importance of crises (doctrine discrepancy or personal observation); and catalysts for crisis (mystical experiences, near-death experiences, and illness and healing). (pp. 44-49).

Rambo's ideology regarding crisis conversion process points also to the various stages of this process. However, respondents who committed a crime which deemed incarceration put themselves at risk for specific crisis (for instance lethal injection or electrocution).

> **Stage 3: Quest** begins with the assumption that people seek to maximize meaning and purpose in life, to erase ignorance, and to resolve inconsistency....people actively look for resources that offer growth and development to 'fill the void,' solve the problem, or enrich life. (p. 56)

Within stage 3, Rambo also explores James Richardson's ideology of the three sets of factors that help one to understand the quest stage of the conversion process. They are:

> response style (person who reacts actively from one who responds passively to conversion), structural availability (the freedom of a person or persons to move from previous emotional, intellectual, and religious institutions, commitments, and obligations into new options) and motivational structures (a theory that [identifies] one overriding motivational factor for conversion, such as conflict resolution, relief of guilt, or compliance with family pressure....). (pp. 56-65).

According to Rambo's ideology, stage 4 is encounter. This stage embraces an advocate also known as a 'missionary' who along with a potential convert come together and begin to engage in processes that will result, for some people, in conversion. This fascinating and complex encounter is a dynamic process. Thus the objective of the advocate is to focus on many strategies in order to embrace a convert and convince him to change from his previous religious beliefs. The major advocate strategies include that the...theory of conversion is extremely important in shaping the experience for the convert (pp. 66-71).

Rambo's, stage 5 is called Interaction: interaction is the stage where "potential converts now learn more about the teachings, life-style, and expectations of the group, and are provided with opportunities, both formal and informal, to become more fully incorporated into it" (p. 102). The respondent in this research emphasize the reasons why they have converted from Christianity to Islam are because the doctrine, community involvement, and kinship elements they have find in Islam.

Stage 6 for Rambo is Commitment, which is: the process that provide a kind of ultimate shaping for a person's experience of the conversion process but also provide a means by which to consolidate a person's beliefs and involvement in a group. Communication rituals both express a person's transformation and allow the person to participate in that transformation. One of the major factors of the commitment stage is "surrender" also known as "the inner process of commitment and is one of the most difficult aspects of conversion to understand.... Many religious traditions require that a convert submit to the authority of a guru, teacher, institution, or other form of authority that will guide the convert's actions, associations, and beliefs" (pp. 124-132).

The last of Rambo's stages of conversion is called consequences. It focuses on what takes place after an individual converts from one religion to another. The major components that govern the consequences stage are personal biases in assessment of consequences that point to a respondent's reasons for conversion. Therefore, the

consequences stage asserts that one convert on the basis of social, psychological, and theological reasons (p. 142).

When Rambo's stages of conversion are reviewed, it is evident that people seek religious change because of social and theological influences. Although he is writing from a Christian prospective, he proposes that the conversion process takes place when seekers encounter disappointment, dissatisfaction, or disillusion within their previous religion. Furthermore, in Rambo's work, the seven stages (*Context, Crisis, Quest, Encounter, Interaction, Commitment, and Consequences*) point to the researcher's survey findings concerning reasons why incarcerated African American males convert from Christianity to Islam during imprisonment.

According to Rambo, it is evident that near-death, illness and healing experiences can induce religious crisis conversion transcendence. Therefore, a convert in crisis situations searches for an alternative approach within or outside of his original faith and tradition (p. 167). This stage notes that a potential convert explores the theological concepts to better understand and communicate the ideology of his old faith with the one he's considering converting to. Thus a decision is made whether the convert will accept or reject this religious belief system. This stage notes also that the convert searches for individuals who seem to be spiritual, honest, kind, and grounded in a particular religion. For this reason, the converter's conversion is due to the personal contact he has with faithful members of his new found religion.

Rambo (1998) delves deeply into religious conversion in his article "The Psychology of Religious Conversion" and points out that "almost without exception, changing to a new religious orientation takes place through what the sociologists call

kinship and friendship networks" (para. 22). Therefore, conversion is more likely to occur if strong bonds of "kinship and friendship" are forged with members of a new faith.

Rambo's (1993) overarching theory pertains to defining the conversion stages that an individual engages in when changing his belief system to another. He grapples with the process of religious changes that occur in a variety of ways such as group persuasion, religious crisis, and unexpected and overwhelming experiences. Rambo asserts that the effect from these factors causes conversion to take place interactively or over a period of time. Thus, in its largest sense, conversion is seen as being a complex process. He also suggests that stages of the conversion processes occurred between a person changing from a traditional to a non-traditional religious belief system (pp. 12-15). From a psychological perspective, Gillespie (1991) suggests that the conversion process focuses on steps and stages that one might take to convert from one religion to another associated with the development of self-identity and personal transformation. He also contends that conversion can take place on the basis of conflict and tensions. According to Gillespie, tensions exist when an individual assumes that something is missing in his/her life and moves into a problem solving mode (pp. 90-93). On the other hand, Fowler (1981) describes the conversion process as a theory of faith development. He suggests that an individual converts on the basis of moral and faith development, strong awareness of human sin, self-concern, self-deception, as well as personal and social self-interest (pp. 19, 28, 93).

Examples of Religious Conversion

Early religious conversion of enslaved African Muslims to Christianity

From the very beginning of the Atlantic Slave Trade, African slaves were converted from Islam to Christianity. "At the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade from 1500 to 1870, many of the Africans slaves were taken from Muslim countries where they spoke Arabic and other traditional languages" (Lumumba, 2003, p. 214). African slaves were transported from Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. From Africa, slaves were transported to South America, Caribbean Islands, and to the United States. According to Walvin (1992), reports Lumumba, "millions of African slaves were Muslims, they were forced to accept the religion of Christianity as practiced by their owners. Many of the Islamic African [enslaved] resisted the conversion to Christianity religion. They attempted to maintain their Islamic lifestyle by adhering to strict diets that included no pork, they prayed five times a day, they wrote the Holy *Qur'an* in Arabic based on their memory, they conversed in Arabic, and maintained their belief in Allah" (pp. 214-215).

It is estimated that thirty percent of the Africans who were enslaved were Muslims. They practiced the traditions and rituals of Orthodox Islam, which had been synthesized with the rituals and practices of their traditional African religions (A. S. Ibn-Ziyad, personal communication, August 16, 2007).

Furthermore, Dasilva, Finkelstein, and Loshin (1972), authors of *The Afro-American in United States History,* contend that enslaved Africans came to the United States believing in either a traditional High God or Allah, the name Muslims call God (p. 36).

Spruell (1999) reports in his newspaper article "Our Muslim Ancestry Revealed" that Allan Austin, a retired professor from Springfield College in Massachusetts, points out that "if the total number of arrivals were 11 million, as scholars have concluded, then there may have been about 40,000 African Muslims in the colonial and pre-Civil War territory making up the United States before 1860" (p. 40). Denny's article "Muslims in American Corrections" (1996) provides "a more conservative estimate of the number of Africans who arrived in the United States with allegiance to Islam. It states that close to 30,000 Muslim slaves came from Islamic-dominated ethnic groups such as Mandingos, Fulas, Gambians, Senegambians, Senegalese, Cape Verdeans, and Sierra Leoneans in West Africa" (p. 148). There is also evidence that the Moors--Arab Muslims in Spain, still called Moros or Moors--who were expelled from Spain after 1492, made their way to the Caribbean and the southern part of the United States (pp. 148-157). Armstrong (2003) reports that historians believe that about 10 to 20 percent of all enslaved Africans were Muslims (pp. 19-23).

African American Conversion from Christianity to Islam

Historical Context

Christianity imposed on African Americans did not last for some. From the time slavery was abolished in 1863 until the mid-1920s, Islam re-emerged and was re-introduced to a significant number of African Americans. Lumumba (2003) points out in his article "The Impact of Al-Islam on the African American Population" that the majority of the research has focused on the development of the Nation of Islam, which was founded by Wali Fard Muhammed and later headed by the Honorable Elijah Muhammed. Presently, the Nation of Islam is under the leadership of Minister Louis

Farrakhan. There is very little doubt that the Nation of Islam has had a major influence on African Americans' interest in and conversion to the religion of Al-Islam. This organization began as a result of the poor conditions of African Americans from the late 1920s throughout the 1930s, the Great Depression era. Prior to this time, many African Americans had migrated from the southern United States seeking opportunities and safety in northern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York. Rather than experiencing a better lifestyle, they experienced discontentment and poverty. Many of the urban areas, riddled with racism and discriminatory practices, were unable to accommodate the masses of people; thus, "ghettos" or highly concentrated areas of impoverished, unemployed Blacks came into existence. Many African Americans, for example, who formerly had jobs, were forced to relinquish them to European Americans and to European immigrants (Fett, 1999, pp. 3-4).

Historical Figures

The conversion from Christianity to Islam is discussed by several prominent historical figures including Noble Drew Ali, Muhammad, and Malcolm X. In 1919, in North Carolina Noble Drew Ali was born Timothy Drew. He became the Prophet of Islam and founder of the Moorish Science Temple (MST). The Moorish Science Temple was established in Newark, New Jersey, 1913, to share in the struggle for equality. It focuses on cultural history, uplifting the fallen humanity, and teaching those things that promote self-worthy. The main thrust of Noble Drew Ali's teachings was the promotion of an incipient nationalist ideology that identified African Americans as "fallen sons and daughters of the Asiatic Nation of North America" (Dannin, 2002, p. 27). The main theme of MST was that African Americans needed to discover their original homeland in

order to experience liberation. Islam for African Americans, therefore, began as an expression of liberation theology (Dannin, 2002, p. 237). It was after the death of Noble Drew Ali in 1929 that his followers split into numerous sects. This work of MST was the precursor to the Nation of Islam (NOI) (Lincoln, 1993, pp. 48-50).

From the late 1930s when Elijah Muhammad himself went to jail because he resisted the draft into the U.S. armed forces, the NOI has been linked to prison systems. Many of its converts have come out of the prisons of America, and many have demonstrated the capacity to change and to be responsible American citizens. Both men and women who passed through this NOI channel have become a source of inspiration and aspiration. For example, Malcolm X, whose autobiography was ghost written by the late Alex Haley, has become a national icon, and his status among young and old African Americans has served as a source of hope and change among many young Blacks who entered the prison system (Turner, 1997, pp. 182-183).

Islam is now a factor in the Black American religious world, and its significance and relevance owe a great debt to the greater visibility of the NOI during the Civil Rights era when men like Malcolm X became major exponents of civil rights' activities. The NOI became a religious and a politically motivated ideological group that offered African Americans an alternative path. According to the late African American theologian C. Eric Lincoln (1993), the NOI emerged as a proto-Islamic group that embraced certain aspects of Islam while simultaneously harboring theological beliefs that are an anathema to Muslims. "Building on the ideological footings of Farad, Elijah Muhammad built the Nation of Islam—the Black Muslims in America—into living, vibrant movement of black self-confidence through self-help and self-development" (p. 258).

In the 1960s, Malcolm X was instrumental in mobilizing the nationalist revival, first as a brilliant, articulate, charismatic spokesman for the Nation of Islam, and then as a revolutionary nationalist. Leading the short-lived Organization of Afro-American Unity, Malcolm kept the doctrines of nationalism--self-determination, self-defense, separatism--before the American public as alternatives to racial integration and nonviolence. Malcolm, a school dropout, was convicted of burglary and sentenced to prison at the age of 21. He converted to the Nation of Islam while in prison, and after his release in 1952, became an active follower of Elijah Muhammad (Lumumba, 2003).

Malcolm served as a minister in New York and Washington, where he attracted large and respectful crowds of followers. At the Harlem Unity Rally in 1969, he advocated against interracial marriage, called for Black self-discipline and unity, and emphasized land as an essential prerequisite to Black nationhood. This philosophy enhanced and expanded his status within the larger Black community. He was considered to be an excellent evangelist and convinced many people, including the famous boxer Cassius Clay, to become a Black Muslim. The Nation of Islam was instrumental in establishing Islamic temples for daily worship, schools, vocational training facilities, and financial institutions. The Nation of Islam became established as an organization that helped African Americans overcome their difficult conditions, both economically and religiously, as well as construct a new racial and political identity. Its commitment to and promotion of Black Nationalism was a major source of its growth and popularity. It also presented itself as an alternative to the Black Christian-inspired Civil Rights Movement (Fett, 1999, pp. 4-8).

Historical Organization: Nation of Islam (NOI)

The Nation of Islam (NOI) received legitimacy as a liberation force as a result of the subordinate and oppressive position in which African Americans found themselves in American society. African Americans were discriminated against in all American institutions—education, housing, employment, and health. Their options for upward mobility on all levels of movement and participation in American society were stunted by brutal laws and beliefs. These official strategies of discrimination created significant problems for African Americans.

The NOI evolved under the leadership of Wali Fard Muhammad and his disciple, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. The Nation of Islam emerged as one of the foremost national separatist movements for African Americans (Dannin, p. 45). What separated the Nation of Islam, almost irrevocably, from the larger Muslim community is the idea of God's eminence in history rather than God's transcendence. In the Muslim community, it is believed that the Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of Allah (the Arabic word for God). All believe that they must abide by the revelations Allah gave to the prophet (as recorded in the Qur'an) and by the H*adith* [sacred writings] (Armanios, 2004). Wali Fard Muhammad, the founder of the Nation of Islam, promoted his perception of the social needs of African Americans in the late 1920s and early 1930s. He taught Elijah Muhammad that the "truth" revealed that Black and White people did not come from the same God. According to this idea, Blacks and Whites were "fundamentally different" in nature: Black people were "righteous and divine," and White people were wicked, "blond, blue-eyed devils." This ideology promoted the proposition that "America is

under Divine judgment to destroy herself for the evils done to Allah's people in slavery" (Turner, 1997, p. 157).

NOI ideology preaches that Blacks are the original humans created by Allah. Therefore, Blacks are encouraged to return to the true religion so that they can be restored to their former position as Allah's chosen people. These messages relay the necessity for African Americans to reconnect, focus on Black supremacy, and acknowledge the importance of Black nationalism.

Furthermore, of all the various sects, the Nation of Islam is the most influential. It centered its teaching on Elijah Muhammad's ideology, which in academic religious categories, has been defined as a sect that accepted the legitimacy of the orthodox caliphates and developed a political, legal, and cultural system consistent with their religious beliefs. The system included the caliphs, who were thought to rule in God's name, and the Qur'an and *Hadiths*, seen as expressing God's will; the system focused on the importance of interpreting both sacred texts and applying the doctrine to everyday life. Scholars such as Lincoln (1993) and Jones (1971) expressed in their works the importance for believers to follow, to be governed, and to shape their lives according to the Qur'an, the sacred text. Members of the NOI do not have a formal clergy, just scholars and jurists, who may offer non-binding opinions. Likewise, any believer may deliver the oration or sermon before the communal Friday prayer. In principle, Muslims are guided by the Qur'an and are responsible for their religious lives and performance of their religious duties (Lumumba, 2003, pp. 210-219).

Robert Spencer's (2002) book *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest-Growing Faith* in Chapter 3 entitled "Does Islam Respect Human

Rights?" explores the doctrine of Islam relating to the way that the Qur'an addresses unbelievers. The Qur'an asserts that Muslim society is separate. Therefore, "Muslim society is divided, and this division makes it tough for the concept of universal human rights to gain much of a foothold" (p. 58).

The Qur'an, which proclaims that "Muhammad is God's Apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another" (Sura 48:29). Far from being endowed with unalienable rights according to the Western idea, unbelievers in the realm of Islam do not seem to be entitled to anything but hatred and contempt, and ultimately great suffering (Spencer, 2002, pp. 3, 58). Because the NOI adheres to these teaching of the Qur'an in governing their lives, the organization has been severely criticized.

Turner (1997) notes that the Nation of Islam became the predominant Pan-Africanist voice for Black Americans in the 1930s. "Its political ideology focused on the political, economic, social, and technological uplift of African Americans, making them aware of the cultural and historical connections to Africa and the effects of Western imperialism and colonialism on all areas of the world in which people of color lived" (p. 159). As the group's appointed leader beginning in 1931, Elijah Muhammad advocated a complete economic withdrawal from the European-American community and the establishment of separate states in the United States for African Americans.

> By recognizing African Americans' poor housing, economic, and educational conditions, the Nation of Islam sought to rectify these conditions. The overall purpose was to improve African Americans' self-esteem, self-worth, and self-reliance. The Nation of Islam focused on the

> theory that African Americans could never improve their conditions unless they came in touch with Allah (Arabic for God). Therefore, the Nation of Islam was instrumental in establishing Islamic temples for daily worship, schools, vocational training, and financial institutions. The Nation of Islam was, thereby, instrumental in helping African Americans overcome their difficult conditions. (Lumumba, 2003, p. 211).

In his article, "Islamizing the Black Body: Ritual and Powers in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam," Curtis (2002) asserts that the NOI is more of a ritual and not "religious" nor "Islamic." This article challenges still pervasive scholarly claims by proposing that Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam (NOI) was neither primarily religious nor Islamic in nature. "Using ritual as a vantage point from which to analyze the structure and function of both religious and political activities within the movement, this essay shows how the ritual "islamization" of the black body was a central feature of movement life from the 1950s through the 1970s" (pp. 167-196). Adopting some theoretical tools from Bell's (1992) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, "the article also explores the relationship between ritual and power within the organization itself and its interactions with the larger social worlds of which it was a part" (pp. 167-196).

> As a religious organization the basis of NOI belief system was in creating and sustaining their rituals. However, Curtis (2002) indicates that Elijah Muhammad and his followers depicted the black body as a battleground for the souls of black folk, a site of contestation where members of the NOI would save themselves from white and black Christian violation, poison, and in the case of men, emasculation. NOI rituals sought to

> reform the black body by paying attention to issues of body weight, diet, coiffure, attire, cleanliness, and more. At the same time, these rituals emphasized the centrality of Elijah Muhammad's prophetic voice in the practice of Islamic religion. Muhammad's followers often understood the performance of these ritualistic acts as a response to the prophetic call of the Messenger of God. (para. 2)

In addition, Curtis provides a new perspective on the Nation of Islam (NOI) by adopting a religious-studies approach that focuses specifically on religious ritual, ethics, doctrine, and narrative. Several distinctive features of Curtis's book, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam*, emphasize that the NOI is both religious and Islamic, thereby challenging earlier studies of the movement that argued that the group was a political organization masquerading as religion. Insisting on the Islamic nature of the NOI, no doubt, will cause consternation among Muslims and interpreters who have variously argued that the NOI is heretical, racist, and idiosyncratic. Curtis supports his argument about the Islamic nature of the NOI by showing that it combined various elements of Afro-Eurasian Islamic traditions, especially Sunni doctrines, with African American religious traditions to create a distinctive form of Islamic practice (2006, pp. 44-59).

In reflecting on the issues surrounding the NOI, it is evident that conflicting opinions exist concerning the identification and impact of the NOI. For example, Curtis asserts that "Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam (NOI) was neither primarily religious nor Islamic in nature"....[he] proclaims it as a ritual. Other scholars argue that NOI is the racial, social, and political foundation that freed the Blacks from their oppressive state.

The NOI has successfully grappled with issues that Blacks are still dealing with today: racism and the segregation of Blacks and Whites. As a result, the NOI is credited with resuscitating a group of Black people (Curtis, 2006, p. 241). For example, they have developed a black culture in the poor areas of American society and advocated black pride that promoted black self-confidence. The goal of the NOI was "to end the process of desegregation of black and white people and to build up an independent Afro-American state" (Fett, 1999, p. 3).

An analysis of the composition of the NOI reveals that among their largest population is the incarcerated African American male. A principal reason for this is the effectiveness of the rehabilitation strategies used by Islamic leaders. Many scholars have noted that the NOI contributed to the following:

> dignity and self-esteem of the Black under caste in America. Suddenly, the prison warden and the social workers and the people who depended on Black labor were saying that the NOI had done a better job of rehabilitating the Black déclassé than of all the official agencies which addressed the task. [There was an] awareness in the Black community that the Black Muslims had done more to exemplify Black pride and Black dignity, and to foster group unity among the Black masses than any of the more reputable, integrational-oriented civil rights organizations. (Fulop & Raboteau, 1997, pp. 284-286)

Al-Deen (2002), a freelance writer and author of Islamic mystery novels, has had a long career in law enforcement and corrections at the state and federal levels. In his article "Prison and the Struggle for Dignity, he addresses the issues of how the NOI

embraces incarcerated Black males, which is instrumental in them converting. New members of the NOI go through a process that changes their names. When the converts become affiliated with the NOI, they "[win] rights that had been previously denied other inmates, [win] the right to receive religious mail, the right to visitation by their clergy, the right to a nonpork diet, and the right to wear bow ties with their prison uniforms. Eventually, they also [win] the right, even inside maximum-security facilities, to have visits from their "ministers," and later to hold prayer services, meetings and classes" (p. 142). NOI supporters applaud this organization for its aim to foster brotherhood and to promote self-identification.

In contrast to the many positive attributes of the NOI, what some perceive as negatives relates to attitudes the NOI expose on race relations and religious doctrine. The Nation of Islam (NOI) does not support socialization outside of their sect. So doing, it goes against what the Qur'an and the Islamic values teach in regard to social interaction. Similarly, Young (2001), editor of the *Islam For Today*, contends in his article "What's In A Name? - The Problem with the "Nation of Islam" that one of the errant issues of this organization is their theological belief system. The NOI

> does not adhere to the core tenets of Islamic theology. They believe that God appeared on earth in the person of their founder, a 'great man from the East,' Master W. Fard Muhammad, a preacher who first came to public attention in the USA on July 4, 1930, then mysteriously 'departed the scene' on February 26, 1934. As the NOI website unambiguously declares: 'WE BELIEVE that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July, 1930; the

long-awaited 'Messiah' of the Christians and the 'Mahdi' of the Muslims. (para. 4)

According to the NOI, the Black race is superior to the White race. The Black origin was not Africa, but Mecca. To the NOI, the doctrine of Islam is the true religion. To them, Christianity is a cult (Fett, 1999, p. 4). Espousing ideas of this nature has caused conflicts for the NOI.

Historical Organization: Sunni Islam

Historically, the name Sunni Islam derives from the word *Sunna*, and this group was actually founded by the Shia Fatimid dynasty in 969 CE. Sunni Islam originated in the decades immediately following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632. Sunnis regard Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin/son-in-law as the fourth and last of the "rightly guided caliphs" (successors to Muhammed [pbuh] as leader of the Muslims) following on from Abu Bakr 632-634, Umar 634-644 and Uthman 644-656. Theologically, Sunnis do not have a formal clergy, just scholars and jurists, who may offer non-binding opinions. Sunnis agree on the core fundamentals of Islam - the Five Pillars - and recognize each other as Muslims (Abdulwaheed Amin, 2001, para. 1-7).

In regards to ritual, the ideology of the Sunnis, one of the dominant Islamic sects, focuses on the contents of the Qur'an and *Hadith*; the NOI sect, on the other hand, under the leadership of Warith Deen, son of Elijah Muhammad, retains only a vague idea of the Qur'an, *Hadith,* and the *Five Pillars* of Islamic practices (Dannin, 2002, p. 73). The Sunnis' logic to rationalize the existence of God is different from the NOI beliefs. The Sunnis believe in a twofold principle that "truth could be sought by using reasons given in the Qur'an, and man has a free will and creates his own acts; the Qur'an was written

and is not the words of God" (Mahmood, 2002, p. 132). Consequently, the NOI's focus was on the organization's structure, working to pay their dues, and keeping themselves morally upright. It is projected that under the Sunni's ideology, the converts in prison concentrated on the rehabilitation of African Americans who, in crisis situations, retaliate against White mainstream culture or succumb to involvement in other criminal activities.

Furthermore, Sunni Islam, after a time of political upheaval as far back as the late ninth and early tenth centuries, became the predominant philosophy for Islamic believers.

> It was obviously not a rationalist creed, but more of a mystical and contemplative discipline. It encouraged Muslims to see the divine presence everywhere, to look through external reality to the transcendent reality immanent within it, in the way that the Qur'an instructed. It satisfied the hunger that was so evident in the ideas of the Hadith People, for an immediate experience of God in concrete reality. It was also a philosophy that was congenial to the spirit of the Shariah (law, seen as deriving from the Qur`an). By observing the sunnah (the traditional portion of Muslim law, based on the words and acts of Muhammad, and preserved in the traditional literature) of the Prophet in the smallest details of their lives, Muslims identified themselves with the Prophet, whose life had been saturated with the divine. To imitate the Prophet, the Beloved (habib) of God—by being kind to orphans, to the poor or to animals, or by behaving at meals with courtesy and refinement—was to be loved by God himself. By weaving the divine imperative into the interstices of their

lives, Muslims were cultivating that constant remembrance (dhikr) of God enjoined by the Qur'an. (Armstrong, 2000, pp. 64-65)

Clegg's (1997) book *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* contends that "orthodox" rivals of the Nation of Islam attempted to appeal to those African Americans who were spiritually unfulfilled by Christianity but could not force themselves to write off as impractical or undesirable the goals of the Civil Rights Movement and the larger struggle for a brotherhood of man. The attacks of Sunni Muslims and others on the white-devil theory and racial separatism of the Nation were solidly supported by traditional readings of the Qur'an and other Muslim texts, which stressed the relatedness of humanity regardless of race" (p. 134).

Historical reasons for conversion to Islam

The historical reasons for African Americans' conversion to Islam are varied. This transition may be due in part to the similarities between the two faiths. Some authorities point to the commonality of Abraham in Christianity and Islam and the NOI. Martinson (1994) contends that for "both Muslim and Christian, the deepest commitment is to the one and only God who is of infinite mercy. For both, the deepest desire is to live in the will of that one God so that all peoples might know God. Another commonality of Christianity and Islam is daily prayer. The Muslim daily prays, 'Show us the straight way,' and the Christian daily prays, 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done'" (p. 99). Prayer in Islam is a direct link between the worshipper and God. In prayer, individuals feel inner happiness, peace, and comfort, and a satisfaction in feeling that they please God. In Christianity, prayer is the assurance to the believer in the certainty of his future and full redemption (Ryrie, 1995, p. 382).

Historically, to many African Americans, "Islam is often positively associated with education and the struggle for liberation, self-determination, and identity. Despite the negative stereotypes that some Christians have about Islam, it has liberated many Black men from a racial identity crisis" (Abu-Muhammad, 2005, p. 38). The NOI structure and order meet the needs of African American men, during and after incarceration. Among the many things that attract African Americans to Islam, one of its principal attractions is the emphasis on discipline. It attracts African American men whose past religious experience lacked discipline. A young Los Angeles gang-banger insists that:

> Islam has changed my life tremendously. It has caused me to be disciplined to an extent I never thought possible for me. I came out of a culture that reveled in undisciplined and rebelliousness, etcetera. So to go the opposite direction was major for me. I firmly believe and see that for the 1990s and beyond, Islam will be an even more dynamic force and alternative for many prisoners, especially the confused and angry youth who are more and more receptive to the teachings of Islam and the self-esteem, discipline and respect it provides them in abundance, not to mention the knowledge (Dannin, 2002, p. 169).

Martinson (1994) contends that African American Muslims depend on many sources in order to mold their lives in an upright manner before God. Besides the Qur'an, they turn to the reports of the Prophet Muhammad's example and his decisions regarding many questions about life (pp. 35-36, 38). The NOI and other African American Islamic groups' messages often bring life to the African American experience, for they focus on

the faith stories to which individuals can relate. This type of NOI theology, popularized by the NOI, contributes greatly to African Americans converting to Islam (pp. 77-81).

Today, there are masses of African Americans who still perceive themselves as oppressed people in American society and continue to find solace and truth in the teachings of the Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam (NOI) recruits from the Black subculture that lives mainly in poorer areas of large cities. The followers of the Nation of Islam have developed a self-confidence whereby they demand their rights to be equal citizens (Turner, 1997, p. 141; Lumumba, 2003, pp. 210-211; Dannin, 2002, pp.11-12).

Jackson (2005), in his book *Islam and the Black American: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* offers a penetrating examination of the career of Islam among America's Blacks. Jackson notes that no one has offered a convincing explanation of why Islam spread among Black Americans (a coinage he explains and defends), but not among White Americans or Hispanics. The assumption has been that there is an African connection. In fact, Jackson argues that none of the distinctive features of African Islam appear in the proto-Islamic, Black Nationalist movements of the early 20th century. Instead, he argues, Islam owes its momentum to the distinctively American phenomenon of "Black Religion," a God-centered holy protest against anti-Black racism. Islam in Black America begins as part of a communal search for tools with which to combat racism and redefine American blackness (p. 235).

African American inmates' conversion from Christianity to Islam

Evidence in Support

There are "African Americans, especially those who are incarcerated who have converted from Christianity to Islam" (Carson, Lapsansky-Werner & Nash, 2005, p. 93).

A movement that began in the 1970s under Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan to evangelize inmates has evolved into one of the most effective religious rehabilitation agendas in the United States. Imams under the Nation of Islam continue to draw converts, but most Muslims in prison today are Sunnis, according to Lawrence Mamiya, a professor at Vassar College in New York, who has studied Muslim prison ministries. Mamiya estimates that about 10 percent of all prison inmates have converted to Islam. Using his estimate, about 1,800 of the state's 18,000 inmates would be Muslim (Kapralos, 2009, para. 7). Feddes (2006) argues that the most fertile ground for Muslim recruitment of young Black men is the American prison system (p.1). Shaheed (Muslim Chaplain of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC)), shares this view: "Incarcerated African Americans are at the heart of the growth of Islam in the African American community. The rise began during the 1960s, a time for 'soul searching' for many African Americans. This period represents the height of what is called the Black Muslim Movement. Through Islam, African Americans sought and found a sense of identity and self-worth and a connection with the homeland, Africa. This is evident in Muslim organizations of the NOI. By embracing Islam, African Americans are rejecting the presentation of conservative Christianity, which often exalted the White race and talked about milk and honey in heaven after you die" (O. Shaheed, personal communication, March 2, 2008).

Similar to Shaheed, Coates offers an explanation for the resurgence of Islam among Blacks. In the article "The Last Angry Man," Coates (2001) traces the rise of Islam to the establishment of Louis Farrakhan's (head of the Nation of Islam) financial empire which proved--or at least supported the notion that there exists a level of African

American economic independence. According to Coates, the NOI has "historically culled much of its membership not only from the poor, but also from Afro-America's untouchables--the pimps, prostitutes, and pushers" (para. 23). Being affiliated with a group that seemingly epitomizes the dream of financial independence is one catalyst for the poor and the untouchable to convert to Islam. The sect's willingness to work with the Black poor therefore explains in part the resurgence of Islam within this population (p. 39).

Social understandings of African American males in US society

This section of the literature review looks at the social understandings of African American males in US society and their relationship with the institution of prisons. It focuses on three of the most important systems in the United States that ultimately provide the context within which citizens realize the "American Dream" through full and active participation in society: education, employment, and the criminal justice system.

Before exploring the social position of African American men in American society, it is important to understand the forces operating within the US which produce individuals who become prisoners. Several theories help explain the existence of criminal (or deviant) behavior in society: Merton's (1968) structural strain theory (Structural Functionalism paradigm) spoke to deviance (any inappropriate behavior as defined by your social group or society) in society. He introduced five typologies that were geared to goals as defined by society, and he provided the means to achieve those goals. He argued that "innovators," one of the typologies, embraced the goals of the society (as understood in the American Dream) but did not have the means to realize those goals. In short, by touting goals that only a few could enjoy, the society

produced/encouraged deviant behavior; people either worked within the society to attempt to achieve the goals or they found "innovative means" to realize those goals (p. 374).

Spitzer (1975) was equally critical of society, capitalist society, to be exact in its creation of groups of people who are literally thrown out of society. He referred to two groups, social junk and social dynamite. Social junk are those who have fallen or jumped through the cracks of society and who must be cared for by either the state in institutions or by others. Social dynamite, the real threat to capitalist society, is perceived as dangerous. They are rebellious and in confrontation with those systems on which capitalism rest. Both groups are seen as drags on capitalism, as examples of those in opposition to the economic exploitation that occurs in the society. The degree to which these groups are handled in society speaks to their inability to "work life out" as others. He saw a narrowly defined space allowed by capitalism for those who controlled and benefited from structures – economic, social, psychological, and political. Those who did not support the self-exploitation became either social junk or social dynamite (pp. 638-651).

Sutherland and Cressey's (2003) article "Differential Association" implies that criminal behavior is learned in interaction with personal groups and that "....specific direction of motives and drives is [are] learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable" (p. 7). Similarly, Goffman (1963) in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* assert that the manner in which behavior is labeled by society is learned. Becker (1963) proposes in his book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* that all behavior, viewed by some as deviant, is not punished.

As an illustration, he notes that the cop on the beat may walk by someone clearly selling marijuana [*sic*] to arrest a person dealing in crack cocaine. Goffman asserts that it is an important bust because cocaine is perceived by society as more harmful. Becker and Goffman also argue that social groups will create deviance and then determine who is the transgressor (p. 9). For example, team A's star linebacker may deliver an especially hard hit to team B's quarterback, and team A will celebrate, but when team B's linebacker does the same thing, team A demands a flag. Another illustration of this theory is, the law says that Wall Street fat cats who mismanage billions of dollars may have engaged in white collar crime and will be tried in civil court. However, the guy who steals a dollar cake, when arrested, is sent to prison for the remainder of his life because the theft is his "third strike" (pp. 2-16).

When asked why so many African Americans are incarcerated, the answer, though complex, certainly must include certain facts: (1) many of the crimes they commit are the focus of police training and attention and are, therefore, easily solved, whether the arrested person committed the crime or not; (2) they have few funds to pay for well-trained lawyers and thus end up with incompetent public defenders; (3) they attend poor schools (as found in South Carolina's Corridor of Shame) as youngsters and are underdeveloped educationally and spiritually; (4) they end up in menial, low-paying, dead-end jobs that do not allow them to fully participate in society (stories coming out of the mortgage debacle of the last years have been heartbreaking as people whose only dream was to buy a house ended up being bamboozled by "white collar" sharks; and the United States society, in no uncertain terms, makes it clear that young and old black men are "social dynamites" (Sutherland & Cressey, 2003, pp. 67-69).

Goffman (1963) also describes the process of stigmatizing where a person must learn a new identity, independent of his or her desire. The classic example is the woman who had to have a significant portion of her nose removed through surgery; no matter what her triumphs, what everyone focused on was the fact that she did not have a nose. She was stigmatized by her condition; she believed this to be the fact and as she moved out into public, it was. It became her master status. Likewise, the incarcerated are stigmatized and assume a master status for the remainder of their lives too, as ex-convicts. In many states they cannot vote, drive, or secure loans and grants to attend college or trade school, and most damaging, they are hindered in finding gainful employment. All job applications demand that felony convictions must be listed and explained on any job application, generally removing ex-convicts from any serious employment consideration (pp. 2-16).

Education is a key to upward mobility for all groups in the United States: immigrants, working and middle class, and people of color. However, without a sound education, a productive, contributive life is impossible. The men in this study are a perfect example of that, African American men who we can assume the lack of a proper education contributed to them being poor. Over the past several decades, the jobs once occupied by high school graduates have been outsourced to offshore sites or, through technology, been eliminated. Western, Kleykamp, and Rosenfeld (2004) speak to the role of economic inequality as a cause for the prison boom in their book *Economic Inequality and the Rise of U.S. Imprisonment*: "Aggregate figures on imprisonment conceal large educational and racial disparities . . . prisoners average less than 11 years of schooling compared to more than 13 years of schooling among men under age 40 in the

non-institutional population" (cited in Western & Pettit, 1999, paper 150). And dropouts are five times more likely to end up in prison than those who complete their education. Black men are seven times more likely to be in prison than their white counterpart. For those groups in the United States who have been discriminated against, education provides the only strategy for moving into the mainstream of society. Yet, for many incarcerated African American males, this option is not available due to their social and sometimes economic status (pp. 5-8).

With an educational experience that does not prepare men for positive participation in society, employment opportunities are limited at best. Menial employment and minimum wages trap poor and working class men into mind torturing, dead end, low- paying jobs that have few transferable skills. The assurance is that the job mobility will only be horizontal and seldom vertical. With criminal records, the door for any meaningful employment is almost closed. Sociologists have attempted to explain why the United States has such a high rate of incarceration. Western, Kleykamp and Rosenfeld in reference to the prison boom also reports:

> About two-thirds of the American correctional population are housed in state or federal prisons serving sentences for felony convictions of a year or longer. Between 1920 and 1970, the imprisonment rate averaged about 100 per 100,000 of the U.S. population. The 1970 imprisonment rate, at 96 per 100,000, stood near its historic average. By 2001, there were 470 prisoners per 100,000. Growth in the prison population was driven by an increase in prison admissions and increasing time served by prisoners once admitted. (p. 2)

The authors also investigated the role of income inequality as demonstrated in employment, wages, and education and incarceration. Increased inequality in the US wreaks havoc for poor Black incarcerated men. "More than just a social control institution, the prison contributes to the formation of low-education Black men as a discrete social group, with a distinctive life experience that is different from the mainstream (p. 28).

Several sociologists have argued that the decline of employment in urban areas is highly related to incarceration rates. When poor educational experiences are placed in the equation, the argument is even starker. "Among blacks and whites, high school dropouts are more than 10 times as likely to go to prison than men with some college education. Black men are 7 to 8 times more likely to go to prison than white men" (Western, et al, 2004, p. 24).

Wacquant (2002) in his article, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'race question' in the US," argues that the "prisonization of the ghetto" is just another form of institutionalized white supremacy that began with slavery with free slave labor (1619-1865), and progressed to Jim Crow, which was based on sharecropping (South, 1865-1965) to the ghetto populated by the menial laborer (North, 1915-68) to what he refers to as the Hyperghetto and Prison (1968) marked by welfare recipients and criminals. He stresses that:

> Not crime, but the need to shore up an eroding caste cleavage, along with buttressing the emergent regime of desocialized wage labour to which most blacks are fated by virtue of their lack of marketable cultural capital, and which the most deprived among them resist by escaping into the

> illegal street economy, is the main impetus behind the stupendous expansion of America's penal state in the post-Keynesian age and its de facto policy of 'carceral affirmative action' towards African Americans. (pp. 41-60)

Hattery and Smith (2007) discuss the dilemma African American men find themselves in as they traverse a hostile environment. For high rates of these men, the criminal justice system has taken over their existence and defined them. The change in drug laws – criminalizing deviant behavior from misdemeanors to felonies plus an overhauling of the sentencing which began during the 1970s with the war-on-drugs helps explain this tremendous growth in prisons and their populations. Three phrases have been added to the lexicon – mandatory minimums, three strikes you're out, and crack cocaine – that help capture the social construction of young black men in the United States. The complexity and latent realities produced by the above have redefined the American scene, removing millions of men from full participation in building the country. For example, human and social capital that incarcerated black men are unable to produce or hone or contribute to society destroys their relationships with the families they were part of, especially the children, the communities they lived in or might have lived in, the jobs and talents they would have occupied and taxes that could have been paid. This is particularly problematic because the largest number of incarcerated are in their most productive years (pp. 18-44).

Why are so many Black men incarcerated? Wacquant argues that "slavery and mass incarceration are genealogically linked." He notes, "Not one but several 'peculiar institutions' have successively operated to define, confine, and control African-

Americans in the history of the United States." Some ways are through racial division, the *Jim Crow system* of legally enforced discrimination and segregation, the formation of the *ghetto,* and the impact of mass incarceration among African Americans. Wacquant contends also that their numbers have increased as a result of decisions made in many societal institutions that perpetuate the same ramifications that slavery had on the Black community. The ethnic composition of the inmate population of the United States has been virtually inverted in the last half-century, going from about 70% (Anglo) white at the mid-century point to less than 30% today. The difference between arrest rates for Whites and Blacks has escalated. Many have argued that it is because of society and then the criminal justice system has produced longer sentences for crimes among the African American population (pp. 41-60).

In a 1999 inaugural address to the Princeton Theological Seminary, Mark Taylor, a professor of theology and culture, referred to the United States as "Gulag America" [Gulag is a network of forced labor camps in the former Soviet Union; a forced labor camp or prison, esp. for political dissidents (*The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 1997, p. 605)]. Historically, gulags have been associated with strong and oppressive governmental systems. He asserts that the United States is incarcerating more people, men and women, than ever before; a root cause of this problem is that more behavior than ever before has been criminalized, and sentences are getting longer.

Since the context within which the American prison structure and its statistical and social impact upon the Black community continues to exist, this research is an effort to help explain why so many African American males find themselves incarcerated, and

once there, Islam becomes such an important religio-philosophical choice for them (pp. 4-6).

In 1960, the US prison population was just under 340,000; it shot up in 1990 to 1,148,702; in 2001, 2,042,479; and in 2005, 2.3 million (Hattery and Smith, 2007). By 2008, the total number of prisoners held in federal and state prisons and local jails was 2,304,115 inmates, an increase of 0.3% from year end 2007. For all incarcerated Americans, including those on the periphery of the justice system (paroled, house detention, waiting trial, and involved in the juvenile justice system), the figure is closer to 2.6 million (Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009, December, p. 8).

Who are the incarcerated? The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2007) presents the following data: overall imprisoned population in federal and state prisons serving over one year 1,532,800, of which 471,300 are White males and 556,900 are Black males; 50,500 are White women and 29,300 are Black women (Sabol, 2008, December, p. 7). For African American men, the figures paint a dangerous picture: when all of the incarcerated are presented, and the total is 2.6 million, one million or 43 percent are African American men. While they make up only 13 percent of the US male population, they represent 62 percent of the total prison population (Hattery & Smith, 2007, p. 22).

Why the disparity? The experience of "prison like institutions" begins early in the lives of Black children – schools where hallways are patrolled by armed police or intimidating hall monitors; playgrounds where massive locks are placed on gates with no or limited entry; and a school system that provides no books for children to take for study, but develops a system of separatism. In addition, the national media has established a scenario where African Americans are presented as poor. Since being poor

is deviant, African Americans are deviant, and being a criminal is part of the stereotypical Black American male image. It is socially acceptable to have poor schools (note the toleration of the Corridor of Shame in South Carolina or the quality of education in our Nation's capital); to tolerate Black school dropout rates hovering at 50 percent in some areas; to accept unemployment rates in African American communities at 30, 40, and 50 percent, because it is thought that they do not want to work or would rather engage in underground economic activities and are always in need of federal government assistance. These assumptions, prevalent in society, equate African American life with deviant behavior, no matter who the Black people are.

The US state and federal prison systems, where men and families become the cyclical clients of a justice system, incarcerate more than any other country in the world (US, 702 per 100,000; Russia, 628 per 100,000 and China, 118) (Hattery and Smith, 2007). Taylor (1999) points to the growth of prisons (1,700 in 2005) where over 2.3 million men and women, or seven percent of the population, are incarcerated. He blames these staggering numbers on the role of drug laws beginning with Nixon's "War on Drugs" in 1972 to Reagan's "Drug Czar" to Clinton's strategy of stripping incarcerated people of Social Security checks. The drug laws describe a mandatory minimum for crack possession (average sentence is 11 years); changing of drug offenses from misdemeanors to felonies; and the infamous "three strikes, you're out" which required that third felonies eventuated in life sentences. The latter in lieu of the felonizing of drug possession produced a cataclysmic change in the number of young men, especially black men, incarcerated (Taylor, 1999, pp. 4, 9-10; Taylor, 2001, pp. 48-56).

Furthermore, Taylor (1999) presents a discussion of two forms of capital – human and social – that lends an understanding of why African American men not only end up in prison but have such a high recidivism rate. Human capital represents the skills, education, knowledge, honesty, and good habits acquired by members of society, something that cannot be taken away but that allows the possessor to gainfully contribute to society, their family and themselves. Incarceration interferes with human capital for two reasons: young incarcerated men may never find themselves in a position to acquire a job to earn capital, and second, if incarcerated men have the skills, felony records, especially for Black men, undermine their use in legitimate employment that pays a cost of living salary (p. 19).

Social networks are essential to successful living in society. Social capital speaks to the ability to build social relationships which are based on trust and reciprocity. Incarceration interrupts the building of social capital and places ex-convicts in precarious, marginalized existences (Taylor, 1999). While social capital is difficult for ex-convicts to amass in the "free world" in prison, it becomes a life saver when incarcerated men must develop social relationships in prison if they are going to survive (p. 20).

Reasons for Religious Conversion

Social reasons for converting

In his book, *Islam in the African American Experience*, Turner (1997) explores the effect that prominent individuals in the music industry and in the Islamic community have had on the rise of Islamic believers. According to Turner, in the 1990s numerous rappers with Islamic messages started important conversations about Islam in the hip hop community. These conversations were influential in the conversion of African American

youth to Islam (p. 27). Brand Nubian, Poor Righteous Teachers, Public Enemy, Rakim, and MCs are rappers whose music allows them to express resistance to "postindustrial conditions" and the destruction of jobs, affordable housing, and support systems in working-class Black and Latino neighborhoods in New York City and urban locations across the country. History shows that many converts who are rappers were once impressed by Nation of Islam leader, Malcolm X, the major international spokesperson for African American Muslims in the 1960s. He also was linked to an international resurgence of Islam. Malcolm X's eloquent articulation of Black America's identity crisis and its search for "a more authentic identity," its disillusionment with the socio-economic and political agenda of the White mainstream, and its "new-found sense of pride and power" reflected the agenda of contemporary Muslims all over the world (p. 175). This message drew many African Americans to Islam and led to the creation of many African American Islamic organizations, which are present within America's prisons and correctional facilities.

Read and Dohadwala (2003) postulate in their book, *From the Inside Out: Coming Home from Prison to the Islamic Faith,* that incarcerated African American males convert to Islam while in prison because of the Islamic organization's programs. In their book, the Islamic programs are presented in three parts: "Part One: Understanding religious motivation for Islamic service with emphasis on prisoner rehabilitation programs; Part Two: The role Islamic organizations play in preparing prisoners to reconnect to society by examining how Islamic rehabilitation programs enhance social networks among ex-prisoners, families, and communities; provide economic success strategies for ex-prisoners and their families; strengthen networks

among faith-based organizations; and foster leadership development among clergy, laity and members. Lastly, Part Three: Supporting the work of faith-based organizations, and recommendations for action" (pp. 8-29). This report examines the involvement of orthodox Islamic organizations in programs that provide services to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families.

Dannin (2002) shares in his book, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam,* the impact of the conversion of Black Power militants. H. Rap Brown, a convert to Islam, who led the Student Coordinating Committee, offered an alternative which appealed to revolutionary figures suspicious of religion. Brown [Jamil Al-Amin] proposed that "Islam was not inconsistent with their revolutionary goals." Consequently, they joined Brown in organizing Islamic groups and offered "the Qur'an to fellow inmates as a substitute for revolutionary or nationalist literature. The programs of former militants came to envision personal rebirth as a prerequisite for social transformation, a position supported by the passage "Verily, never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves with their own soul" (Qur'an 13:11 or 8:53) (p. 174).

Similarly, a member of the Black Liberation Army reflects on the tremendous effect of these words on Black Power advocates:

> I was a very determined socialist when I was placed in a jail with another black leader. He had already become Muslim, and I was confronted [by] his daily prayers. At first I could not understand why he was praying to a god who, I felt, had abandoned black people. We argued and battled, but eventually Islam helped me become more relaxed. It relieved a burden, because I had become frustrated by the failure of the political movement.

> And then you read the *ayat* in the Qur'an where Allah told the Prophet, 'Maybe we might show you a victory in your lifetime. Maybe we won't, but you must keep striving.' So then you start to see things in a broader perspective, outside of yourself as an individual. It was then that I realized that we didn't really suffer a major defeat but that we were part of an ongoing process that eventually would culminate in victory. (p. 174)

In discussing the results of interviews that he had with several converts to the Nation of Islam from Christianity, Howard (1998) contends that participants made it clear that most Christians joined the Nation because, at some point, they began to feel the need for the organizational support of the NOI's personal systems of value that the Nation provides. Two of the participants attempted to stop what they considered their own "backsliding" after going to California. Both mentioned drinking to excess and indulging in what they regarded as a profligate way of life. Guilt feelings apparently led them to seek Muslim support in returning to more enterprising habits (pp. 32-38).

Dannin (2002) reports in his book, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam,* that African Americans' relationships with Islam function to help an oppressed class overcome social and economic injustice. He asserts that one who follows the laws of Allah can find a sense of freedom from oppression, social issues, and injustice. Dannin explains how many view the sacred text:

> A majority view the Qur'an not only as a divine source of inspiration but also as a practical guide for redressing the deficiencies of inferior jobs, substandard housing, and unequal education that impose daily lessons of subjugation and violence. Islam strikes them as a liberation theology. It

> measures ethical conduct according to a sacred ideal and anchors belief in a knowledgeable tradition whose particular cultural expressions symbolize, quite visibly, an overcoming of the status quo. Those who fail to rise above their material poverty are prone to human error, for they learn time and again that Islam is a "simple religion" that requires obedience to a singular authority who extends a rope that must be clasped tightly and followed along the route to personal redemption. (pp. 237-238)

Islam is quickly gaining converts inside prisons at a time when the government and some religious leaders are encouraging faith as a method of rehabilitation. Experts say the sincere practice of Islam, for example, can develop disciplined, calm and productive behavior among prisoners and a greater chance that they will not return to crime upon release (Kusha, 2009, pp. 7-8).

As has been pointed out, converts to Islam find themselves as being capable of controlling their own destinies through music (hip hop), allowing them to express their resistance to their present conditions of unemployment, poor housing conditions, and disillusionment with the socio-economic and political situations of the White mainstream (Turner, 1997). Read and Dohadwala (2003) assert that socially, incarcerated African American males who convert to Islam find that the Islamic organization's rehabilitation programs prepare them to reconnect to society through social networks among ex-prisoners, families, and communities, as well as to provide economic strategies for ex-prisoners and their families and strengthen networks among faith-based organizations. While other scholars indicate that an individual converts on the basis of spiritual/religious

experiences by seeking truth through the Islamic sacred text, the Qur'an, others point to feeling the need for organizational support for a personal system of value that is provided; and helps overcome social and economic injustice (Dannin, 2002; Howard, 1998).

Psychological reasons for converting

Scholars have cited the following psychological reasons for the conversion of inmates from Christianity to Islam. With specific reference to prison conversions to the Nation of Islam among African Americans, Lincoln (1993) argues that a good deal of recruiting is done in jails and prisons among men and women whose resentment against society increases with each day of imprisonment. Their hatred of Whites builds up to the point of explosion. Ministers of the Nation of Islam are trained to prevent any such release. Lincoln contends that they are adept at channeling aggression and hostility into a kind of reservoir for future use. No act of violence or retaliation against Whites is permitted. Instead, African Americans who convert to Islam while in prison invariably improve in behavior and outlook because of the discipline and focus (pp. 108-109).

Saeed's (2007) article, "Malcolm X and British Muslims: A Personal Reflection," reports Malcolm X's conversion:

> Malcolm X was the prophet of black rage primarily because of his great love for black people. His love was neither abstract nor ephemeral. Rather, it was a concrete connection with a degraded and devalued people in need of psychic conversion. This is why Malcolm X's articulation of black rage was not directed first and foremost at white America. Rather, Malcolm believed that if black people felt the love that motivated that

> rage, the love would produce a psychic conversion in black people; they would affirm themselves as human beings, no longer viewing their bodies, minds, and souls through white lenses, and believing themselves capable of taking control of their own destinies. (West, 2001, p. 136)

This "psychic conversion" touched all aspects of the "black community." Black culture was radically changed to reflect changing consciousness. In politics, sports, and even music, the influence of Malcolm X was directly felt. Black consciousness was invoking new pride in black culture (para.12).

Dammer (2002a) writes in his article "Religion in Corrections" that inmates practice religion while in prison for various personal and/or practical reasons. In some cases, inmates are simply practicing their faith by worshipping God or a higher power. Inmates either grew up practicing a religion or joined a religion later in life (or developed the interest during incarceration). In many cases, inmates gain direction and meaning for their lives from the practice of religion while in prison. They feel that God, or Yahweh, or Allah will provide a direction to go in life, one that is better than their present psychological or physical condition. Some inmates even feel that being incarcerated is the "will of God" and that full acceptance of this will is essential to being faithful in one's religious belief. Having this peace of mind helps inmates improve their well being, especially those serving long sentences (p. 1375).

Furthermore, Dammer (2002b) asserts in his article "Reasons for Religious Involvement in the Correctional Environment" that the use of religion to help change inmates' behavior is one of the benefits both psychological and emotional. The benefit for inmates who practice the discipline and principles required in Islam is that they have

better self-control. "Having self-control helps inmates avoid confrontations with other inmates and staff, and it helps them comply with prison rules and regulations" (p. 1375).

Howard (1998) in "The Making of a Black Muslim" discusses how African Americans develop commitment to the Black Muslim movement. He observes that the Nation of Islam does not in any real sense convert members. Rather it attracts African Americans who have already, through their own experiences in White America, developed a perspective congruent with that of the Muslim movement. Howard writes:

> The recruit comes to the door of the temple with the essence of his ideals already formed. The Black Muslims only give this disaffection a voice. Many African Americans joined the Nation of Islam because of their ongoing frustration in obtaining gainful employment and their need to regain and increase their self-esteem, self-worth, self-dignity, and self-reliance. (pp. 15-21)

Fichter (1976) asserts that "something happened to a converted alcoholic or converted charismatic that brings about a change; and sometimes it could be a quick illumination, or a rather gradual and increasingly insistent spiritual awakening. The spiritual conversion experienced by these men is intended to carry the individual along in a 'new' way of life, and it does for those who stay with it. A spiritual conversion is an interior experience, a decision for Christ, a change of heart, a turning of the mind away from vice and toward virtue, a relinquishing of the past and an embrace of the future. Something "happens" to people who are converted, as it did to Saul on the road to Damascus, and often this "happening" is not a personal choice" (para 1-2).

Additionally, Cokley and Chapman's (2009) studies examined racial discrimination and racial identity as risks or protective factors of violent behaviors in young African American adults. The researchers found that the safeguarding effects of racial identity were more salient for men than women. Males who exhibited low centrality of race were likely to engage in more violent behaviors, whereas violent behaviors were not associated with high centrality males (p. 291). Demo and Hughes (1990) assert that it stands to reason that one of the many psychological consequences of being Black is the development of a racial identity, the degree of which should vary with one's life experiences and social roles. In essence, racial identity does play an important role in the behavior of incarcerated African Americans males (pp. 364-374).

Furthermore, in the article "Study of Religion," the American philosopher and psychologist James (2002), author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, gives his account for conversion that takes place through the concept of invasions from the unconscious. The person who converts has no control over the conversion experiences (p. 232). In an interview, F. Numan, a researcher in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, addressed the psychological reasons that incarcerated African American men convert. He stated that "the impact of slavery of being stripped of identity, name change, and self-worth still exist" which prompts an individual to seek for the true religion" (personal communication, September 24, 2009). De Sanctis and Augur (1927/2003) write in their book *Religious Conversion: A Bio-Psychological Study* that the conversion process takes place when "the convert believes that 'grace' is manifested in the determining cause, no matter what sort it may be; a vision, or a trauma, an exceptional circumstance, or even an ordinary occurrence" (p. 51).

Additionally, the psychological reasons for African American men converting to Islam are described by C. F. Ellis, author of the article "How Islam Is Winning Black America" in terms of the following dimensions to why incarcerated African American men in South Carolina prisons convert: (1) *identity*, a desire to be part of the universal brotherhood Islam claims to offer; (2) *protest*, a rejection of Euro-centric oppression perceived by those who are incarcerated; (3) *dignity*, a desire for the wisdom they perceive in Muslim men; (4) *significance*, a search for the divine purpose of the African American experience; (5) *righteousness*, a quest to purge themselves of the self-sabotaging values which resulted in their incarceration. Many truly want to live a life pleasing to God (personal communication, October 2, 2009).

Researchers have also shown how racial identity plays an important role in the attitude, behavior and self-worth of African America males. Helms' (1990) *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice* uses Cross's attitudinal theory of Nigrescence in her empirical study to show that Black racial identity points to personal identity. Helms offers an explanation of the attitudinal theory of Nigrescence:

> In their review of Nigrescence literature specifically, Cross, et al. (in press) summarized the status of Black racial identity and personal identity variables. They concluded that the majority of the empirical studies based on Nigrescence [the developmental process by which a person 'becomes Black' where Black is defined in terms of one's manner of thinking about and evaluating oneself and one's reference groups rather than in terms of skin color per se] theory and using measures of racial identity, have found deficiencies in personal identity (e.g., depression, low

> self-esteem, high anxiety, etc.) to be most characteristic of Pre-Encounter [the person deliberately idealizes Whiteness and White culture and denigrates Blacks and Black culture through behaviors as well as attitudes.] attitudes, and strengths (e.g., positive self-esteem, low anxiety) to be associated with Encounter and/or Internalization attitudes. (p. 102)

According to Helms' study, the psychological reasons why African American males convert to Islam while incarcerated point to an identity issue.

Various scholars offer their ideology of psychological reasons for conversion among the African American males who converted during imprisonment. The findings of these researchers allude to many different reasons, all of which contribute an improvement in the behavioral, attitudinal, and emotional well being of the inmates. After converting, the inmates display the ability to maintain self-control and increase self-esteem, self-worth, self-dignity, and self-reliance (Dammer, 2002b; Howard, 1998; Lincoln, 1993; Saeed, et al. 2007; and West, 2001).

Theological reasons for converting

Scholars have cited that a principal theological reason for the conversion of inmates from Christianity to Islam is to find freedom from oppression. Zeya's (1990) article "The Growing Presence of American Converts to Islam" reiterates this idea that there are theological reasons for conversion.

> For most African Americans, however, contact with Islam did not come until the early decades of the 20th century. It was at this point that Islam was presented in a context which attempted to redress the long history of oppression suffered by black Americans. Nobel Drew Ali, an African

> American from North Carolina, was among the first to link Islam with the black consciousness. He theorized that blacks should consider themselves to be "Moors" or "Asiatics," which entailed embracing Islam. In his opinion, Christianity was the religion of whites; therefore, converting to Islam would provide a source of pride and unity to the African-American community. (p. 42)

This phenomenon is evident in the work of Steven Barboza (2002) who wrote in his article "My Odysse to Islam" that in particular, dissatisfaction can be a vehicle that leads to conversion. Barboza's abandonment of Roman Catholicism was spawned by the untimely death of his 49-year-old mother on the day before his twenty-second birthday (as cited in Wolfe & Beliefnet, 2002). He prayed to God to save her, but when He did not, he established a new line of communication and called on Allah. For Barboza, Christianity as practiced in the Roman Catholic Church was lacking and unsatisfying. To him, a religion should be more than just attending mass once a week; indeed it should satisfy an individual's spiritual needs. In contrast, Islam offered a code of conduct on how to run his daily life and how to communicate with God. Prostrating in prayer five times a day, as a Muslim, offered him more solace than he had ever found kneeling before a crucifix. Barboza also notes that he found peace and fulfillment in Orthodox Islam. As a religion, it offered clear-cut guidelines for living; as a social movement, it stood for pride born of culture and discipline (pp. 233-236).

Barboza maintains that conversion to Islam among African Americans is a significant feature in the American faith community. Many converts feel that Christianity as practiced in the United States does not offer a complete way of life

(pp. 233-236). Chapman (1996) reports that African Americans' conversion takes place on the basis of "social, political, and religious dimensions of the African American freedom struggle.. . ." He also contends, "Those who accepted Christianity—despite their oppression at the hands of White 'Christian' slave masters—created a distinct expression of the faith that enabled them to maintain their dignity in the midst of a brutal, dehumanizing institution" (pp. 2-3).

Another theological reason that incarcerated African American men convert centers around morality. In Winchester's (2008), "Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus," he reports that in interviews with converts, he [I] asked what, if anything, had changed in their lives since converting to Islam. While the answers to this particular line of questioning certainly varied from convert to convert, it was also true that there were striking similarities in converts' responses, especially around issues concerning morality. For these converts, coming to Islam was largely about the development of a new type of moral subjectivity —a new set of dispositions (e.g., thoughts, feelings, desires, sentiments, and sensibilities) about what is good and bad, right and wrong, permissible and taboo, sacred and profane, beautiful and unsightly in both one's self and the larger world (p. 1761).

In their article, "Muslim Converts in Prison," Spalek and El-Hassan (2007), present a similar outcome of reasons why English incarcerated males convert as those found for why African American males who are incarcerated convert. Their study, conducted in two prisons in England, suggests that Islam also provides a moral framework from which to rebuild their lives. As such, the positive work carried out by prison Imams, supporting and helping to resettle individuals who are newly released from

jail appeals to inmates who convert. At the same time, Islam seems to help prisoners cope more positively with the prison environment, reducing their propensity to aggression and violence (p. 99).

Views of chaplains are important in understanding theological aspects of conversion. According to Shaheed, Senior Muslim Chaplain of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC), the Muslim inmates in Broad River and Walden do not proselytize. Out of their convictions, inmates invite others to Jumah, which is prayer on Friday. He states that African American men in the SCDC are seeking religious freedom. This freedom is found in the religious services and in having access to classes organized through the Islamic affairs of South Carolina (O. Shaheed, personal communication, January 30, 2007). In his article, Zoll (2005) also offers a chaplain's view of the African American inmate's relationship with Islam. Zoll reports that chaplains describe the typical inmate that converts to Islam as a poor Black American upset about racism, who turns to Islam to cope with imprisonment. Without Islam, they are more likely to re-commit their original crimes after their incarceration (para. 12).

Moreover, Hamm (2008) in his article "Prisoner Radicalization: Assessing the Threat in U.S. Correctional Institutions" highlights a study which investigated the Kevin James (falsely accused of the death of 7-month-old Aleeha Hardway) case as part of a larger study on radicalization in prison. Hamm's study examined trends in prisoner radicalization — or the process by which prisoners adopt extreme views, including beliefs that violent measures must be taken for political or religious purposes — in U.S. correctional institutions (p. 14). He reports that there is no connection between terrorism and the conversions, more likely *social and theological.* In Hamm's study, the data

indicated that most inmates convert in prison because of the need for protection; the primary motivation he found was spiritual "searching" — seeking religious meaning to interpret and resolve discontent. The prisoners took on several new roles in their quest for meaning and identity (p. 16).

Much of the research on theological reasons for converting to Islam are frightened attempts to try to prove that religious radicalism and terrorism are at the heart of black inmates converting to Islam, as depicted in the 2007 program, *Homegrown: Islam in Prison Explores the Rise and Influence of the Muslim Faith in the U.S. Penal System*. Its insinuating/clever subtitle is "Are Prison Conversions Breeding Solid Citizens or Religious Radicals?" Before the program was aired in November 2007, this statement was included in the press release:

> 'Homegrown: Islam in Prison' draws on the views of imams, prison converts to Islam, law enforcement and chaplains and other experts to examine the Islamic faith in America's penal system. 'Homegrown: Islam in Prison' illuminates the dichotomy surrounding this issue: is the teaching of Islam in prison providing meaning and direction to what had previously been lost lives, or is it a distorted Islam fostering an extremist ideology here in America? (para. 3)

Reporter, Dridi (2002) comments in his article "Converts Say Islam Has Given Their Lives Structure" on Islam's impact on the structure of his interviewees' lives. Interviewee Abdul Raheem Ali, the former Marine who works as a bricklayer, is reported as saying:

> He believes that his religion taught him how to be a man. Islam structures everything in your life, with very precise rules, from the way you have to wash while in the bathroom to the way you treat your wife and children, to the way a state has to be run (to) protect the vulnerable, the poor and guarantee justice. . . . Nobody taught us all these things before. (para. 31)

At the same time, Abu Muhammed (2005), teacher of English at Howard University, proclaims, "It was Islam that liberated some Black [people] from racial identity crises and from intellectual arrogance" (pp. 38-39). Rashid (1999) contends in his article "Islamic Influence in America: Struggle, Flight, Community" that many "African American men long for structure and order. Variation in Muslim practices worldwide can be attributed to local culture, social conditions and historical traditions. Yet despite these variations, Islam, the religious ideal, remains unchanged" (p.7). Both Muhammed and Rashid are making a general statement about Islam, which provides one example of why Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and perhaps why there is a large following within the African American community.

Studies have shown that inmates consider penal institutions as oppressive, violent and exploitative: thus they seek prison-bound conversion as an effective means of protection. Some studies have shown that new converts believe that Islam is capable of providing a moral compass against those aspects of prison life that deprive a person of his or her moral worth and dignity. These include practices such as forced homosexuality, illicit drug use and pushing, alcoholism, or petty theft, to name a few. "Thus, conversion to Islam may be due to an inmate's expectation of functional post-release incorporation within the 'community of believers,' which not only provides the wherewithal for prison-

bound protection, but is also capable of providing employment and housing to ex-convicts within the embracing arms of the same 'community of believers upon release" (Kusha, 2009, p. 8).

Larson, Director of the Zwemer Center and Associate Professor of Muslim Studies at Columbia International University, reports in his article "Christian Response to Islam in America" that inmates are looking for self respect, discipline, family values, moral standards and deliverance from drugs and alcohol. According to Islam, they can change the stereotype of the young Black male on drugs, out of work, and in jail. It is a new way of life, a path not only to God, but of self-respect and dignity (2005, pp. 48-55). Moreover, since rape is now so common in our prison system, it is quite possible that Black males choose Islam simply for their own protection because Muslims stick together and protect one another. Scholars have estimated that "as many as 400,000 inmates, the vast majority of them are men, have been sexually assaulted at least once" (Stricherz, 2003, Violated Felons, para. 5).

"Black America, Prisons and Radical Islam," an article written by Hamm (2008) and published by the Center for Islamic Pluralism that the U.S. Justice Department Commissioned Study on Prisons and Religious Conversion, describes a five-point paradigm for Islamic conversions in correctional systems. The first paradigm is the Crisis Convert. This type enters religion because of a personal breakdown, perhaps based on the shock of incarceration and its attendant isolation from friends, family, and daily life. In prison subcultures, the inability to cope is viewed as a sign of weakness, and vulnerability is dangerous in prisons. The second paradigm is the Protection-seeking Convert. This category of conversion is treated separately by Hamm. It clearly identifies

with an existing prison community as a major guarantor against exploitation of convicts by gang members. Third, the Searching Convert, is one who is affected by the importance of religious options present in prisons to which he may have been indifferent in the outside world. Fourth, the Manipulating Convert, is an individual converted to a religion to gain advantages in prison diet, availability of literature, social interactions, and similar benefits. Finally, the Free-World Convert enters a religion because of outreach programs originating with religious institutions and programs outside prisons (pp. 14-19).

O'Connor is an administrator of religious services for the Oregon Department of Corrections where he manages and evaluates the implementation and impact of a broad array of faith-based programming and religious services for over 10,000 incarcerated men and women in 13 prisons around the state. O'Connor and Perreyclear (2002) write in their book, *Religion, the Community, and the Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders,* about a study to evaluate a theory of religious conversion, social attachment and learning guides of prison religion and its influence on the rehabilitation of adult male offenders. The research conducted was an extensive study of religious involvement of inmates in a security prison of South Carolina" (p. 11). They found "as religious involvement increased, the number of inmates with infractions decreased. Infractions are defined as 'an incident of breaking of institution's rules for which the inmates are caught and found guilty.' It could be anything from assaulting someone, to being caught in a restricted area, to having contraband in one's possession, or escaping" (p. 25). O'Connor also found that the more religious sessions an inmate attended, the less likely he was to have an infraction. Thus, in this study, religion plays a valuable role in the lives of inmates;

the rehabilitation process within the institution is a motivational factor in their lives and in the restoration of their identity and self-worth.

Cone, an advocate of Black liberation theology, proposes an additional answer to the research question "What theological factors encouraged this group of incarcerated African American males in this study to convert to Islam?" Cone's (1970) book *A Black Theology of Liberation* points to the answer that these incarcerated African American males are identifying in some way with the Islamic concept of God as being a Black God. Cone explains how an individual can know God:

> . . . God's self-disclosure is the distinctive characteristic of divine revelation. . . .Rather, revelation has to do with God as God is in personal relationship with humankind effecting the divine will in our history. . . Revelation is God's self-disclosure to humankind *in the context of liberation*. To know God is to know God's work of liberation in behalf of the oppressed. God's revelation means liberation, an emancipation from death-dealing political, economic, and social structure of society. (p. 45)

In addition, Dammer (2002b) writes "The reasons for religious involvement in the correctional environment" in O'Connor's and Pallone's book *Religion, the Community, and the Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders*. He discovered that inmates practice their religion either to motivate or to sometimes manipulate others (pp. 35, 38).

On the basis of O'Connor's, Pallone's, and Dammer's findings, religion is a fundamental factor in an inmate's life and in his reasons for conversion. Two reasons are prominent:

- Religion is a guide to not get out of hand, [sic] it gives you a straight path. (W23)
- It (religion) is a way of life, [sic] it is a road map, a way to be constantly aware of bad habits. (W28)

According to Dammer, a "by-product of providing direction for inmates is that religion provides hope for those who are incarcerated. Inmates need hope to keep optimistic about the future and the possibility of being released. Some inmates hope that when released they will be reformed from a life of crime and future imprisonment" (p. 40). The inmates expressed to Dammer in conversation the following statements:

- Religion gives them hope.
- Religion keeps hope alive.
- Religion gives them (inmates) something to look forward to.
- The sincere inmates have hope for the future, for a better life than being in prison. (p. 40)

In addition, five inmates indicated to Dammer that "being incarcerated was in fact 'what God wanted for them; being in prison was 'God's will,' and full acceptance of His will was essential for being truly sincere in one's faith. They felt that incarceration was part of a plan that God held for them, and it was their responsibility to live out that plan" (p. 40).

Critical Summary of the Review of Literature

Major researchers of the phenomenon of conversion have amassed an impressive body of literature to explain reasons for conversion and the conversion process. As such, the studies reveal the value of interpreting reasons for converting from one religious sect

to another. The research reveals that conversion is a process which involves steps and stages. They may vary according to the researcher, but this transformation occurs gradually.

The research also creates a composite of the individual who is likely to convert. Principal traits include feeling lonely, having no self-worth, and being separated from one's family or church. Often times these individuals have experienced life's stressors such as poverty and even incarceration. These characteristics are catalysts which make conversion a more viable choice.

Researchers tend to see conversion as caused by either social, psychological, or theological factors. A major social tenet suggests that individuals convert because of Islamic organization's programs. Psychologically, a primary premise is the benefit of conversion resulting in behavior change, self-control and self-discipline. Dissatisfaction with previous tenants or experience is the major theological reason for converting from one faith to another.

Further analysis of the research reveals that most studies focused on individuals who have chosen to convert from the Judeo-Christian faith to Islam. These subjects may be either incarcerated or part of the general population. If incarcerated, the greatest number of participants were generally African American males. Researchers agree that many individuals who enter prison begin to seek after and/or identify groups in order to belong. They are subject to be pressured into gang-style associations or to change their traditional religion belief system on the basis of doctrine.

In the research studies surveyed by the researcher, few included subjects from religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or other Eastern faiths. Indeed most often, the

participants were initially of Protestant faith. Geographically, many of the major studies focused on persons in the western part of the United States in areas such as California; others were undertaken in Indiana.

Though the research on conversion appears fairly comprehensive, this researcher realized that there is more to be investigated. The role that women play in the lives of men who convert from one belief system to another, how this information could be used by practitioners and others of the Christian faith to re-evaluate and train their prison ministries to assess their effectiveness in meeting the social, psychological and theological needs of incarcerated individuals, and the lack of attention to the conversion experience of female inmates from one belief system to Islam have yet to be explored. Moreover, gaps that the researcher found and sought to fill, which would be advantageous in increasing the knowledge in this field of study, are in the areas of sampling, design, administration and instrumentation.

Even though some of the major figures of Islam nationally and statewide are included in the research, no prior studies were found which had been implemented within the prison system in the state of South Carolina, which prompted this researcher to target this system and its distinct groups of inmates. Research had not been conducted in the surrounding states either. In addition, the design and administration of this study were unique in that the sample was comprised of "only" African American men who had converted from Christianity to Islam. Exclusive to this study was that it obtained samples from four different prisons, with diverse populations located in various geographic regions within the state. Even though the researcher chose to analyze the data as one sample, future studies can be performed establishing each prison as a separate group to

compare with the other groups. The results of this type study will add to the body of knowledge concerning conversions.

For most researchers who chose prisoners as their subjects, a primary means to obtain their data was to employ unstructured personal interviews with prisoners and chaplains. There was an absence of studies that were based on a structured written survey, except for a study that sought to discover a connection between conversion and terrorism. Therefore, a distinctiveness of this researcher's study was the comprehensive design and careful consideration of the components of the survey. First, the survey was designed to purposefully target the social, psychological, and theological factors concurrently. Researchers in the literature review isolated and treated each factor as independent of the other and discussed the role that each played in the conversion process. The present researcher sought to understand the role that all three factors combined played in the conversion of inmates, to gain a more inclusive picture of the inmates personally and their reasons for conversion, in order to contribute valuable knowledge to the current body of literature.

Second, there was an absence of research that centered on understanding the role, if any, that demographics play in the conversion experience. Therefore, the survey used for this study intentionally incorporated questions into the demographic section to glean information from the inmates. Even though the information collected was not used in the analysis of this study, future studies will permit such comparisons. Other deficient areas that the survey probed were the length of their sentences, the time served, the type of conviction, and the sect of Christianity the inmates practiced before conversion. This

information would provide useful data to correlate and use in understanding the relationship between incarceration and conversion.

Third, prior studies failed to investigate the motivation of inmates to convert from Christianity to Islam utilizing an instrument with *Likert* scale items. This was a very important feature of the instrument. The researcher sought to explore the inmates' perspectives through the use of a user-friendly format that respected their educational level. The knowledge gleaned would contribute to the current body of knowledge by explaining the reasons why inmates convert from their individual perspectives. Having an instrument of this nature is valuable in obtaining pertinent data when researching the conversion experience within various populations, not just with inmates.

Based on a review of the literature, the researcher noticed several gaps, such as, the role that women play in the lives of men who convert from one belief system to another; how the use of this information could be used by practitioners and others of the Christian faith to re-evaluate and train their prison ministries to assess their effectiveness in meeting the social, psychological and theological needs of incarcerated individuals; and the lack of attention on the conversion experience of female inmates from one belief system to Islam.

Furthermore, in this study, the most compelling gaps within this study were to engage in future research regarding reasons why one might convert in other prisons of South Carolina; to do further research in order to find the correlations between demographics (age, prison sentence, etc.) and conversion of inmates; and to explore reasons why the Baptist sect had such high rating for converting to Islam.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This section describes the method employed to investigate the conversion of African American incarcerated men from Christianity to Islam. The target population, sampling method, design, instrument, protocols, and procedures are discussed. This research project is guided by the following research questions.

Research Questions

This study was designed to examine a set of research questions about incarcerated African American males who converted to Islam. In particular, the research questions were:

RQ1: What social factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

RQ2: What psychological factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

RQ3: What theological factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

The Approach

A descriptive approach was utilized to investigate the reasons why incarcerated African American males convert to Islam. The research questions were generated out of an interest to identify and understand the factors which encouraged incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam. The method to obtain data on the topic was to utilize *Likert* scale items, which generated quantitative data. Open-ended questions were

helpful in generating limited qualitative data, which augmented information derived from the *Likert* scale items.

Identifying the Sample

This study's sample is comprised of eighty-two (82) African American males between the ages of 18-50 who converted to Islam while imprisoned. The sample was drawn from the population of incarcerated men in four South Carolina prisons: Lee, Leiber, McCormick, and Manning. These prisons were selected because of their large Muslim inmate populations. The respondents were selected using the "convenience sampling" technique. The convenience sampling is a method whereby the researcher uses persons who randomly volunteer to participate in a survey questionnaire designed to acquire information that is pertinent to a research project (Bernard, 2000, p. 178). To obtain this "convenience sampling," the researcher had the assistance of chaplains at each prison who helped in identifying the inmates who had converted. Chaplains, who kept meticulous records on inmate conversions, knew the men as a result of their work-related roles within the chaplains' offices. In some cases this has been an ongoing work relationship for ten years and more.

The chaplains were selected to administer the survey because they are highly trained and experienced persons who supervised all of the religious activities including the selection of coordinators for Muslims inmates' religious affairs. Their main responsibility is to be accessible and sensitive to the inmates' needs both on a personal and a religious realm. The chaplains could allay the inmates' concerns about the content, the confidentiality of the participants' data, and the use of the survey for academic purposes only. Chaplains are responsible for keeping accurate records of all converts and

they were available to further encourage inmates to share their conversion experiences. They are also familiar with the education and reading level as a result of their daily interaction with the inmates.

To teach chaplains the procedures for administering the survey, the researcher scheduled training sessions at each prison. Then those chaplains assembled a group of inmates who had converted, introduced them to the research topic, and asked them to volunteer to participate in the survey. The criterion the chaplain used for selection of participants for the study was that the inmate had to have converted from Christianity (i.e., any Christian denomination) to Islam while incarcerated. Eighty-two (82) inmates willingly volunteered to participate and share their conversion experiences. The identified inmates were asked to complete items on the survey as thoroughly and honestly as possible.

Population

The researcher strategically chose four institutions throughout the state based on information acquired from Imam Omar Shaheed concerning which regions of the state of South Carolina had the higher percentages of inmates who had undergone a religious conversion experience from Christianity to Islam. The chosen institutions are located in four different regions: Lee Prisons (Coastal), Leiber (Lowcountry), McCormick (Upstate), and Manning (Midlands). The population of each prison generally reflects the socioeconomic and demographic status of this area of the state.

To identify a sufficient number of participants, the researcher, with assistance from Shaheed, contacted the chaplain at each pre-selected institution to confirm the availability of a sufficient number of inmates who had undergone a conversion

experience. The chaplain of each institution selected individual inmates to participate in the study based on his personal knowledge of each prisoner's religious preference and conversion experience. Ultimately, from these four institutions a total of eighty-two (82) African American inmates participated in the survey: Lee (25), Leiber (24), McCormick (12), and Manning (21).

Data Collection Procedures

According to the data on the average educational backgrounds of prisoners in South Carolina prisons, 53% of African American males are reading below the ninth grade level, and 75% are reading below a twelfth grade level (South Carolina Department of Corrections Profile of Inmates in Institutional Count, 2010, p. 1). Because of these statistics, the researcher designed the Burgess Survey of Religious Conversion (BSRC) so that it was user-friendly and simple. Information on the cover page of the survey stated that the study was being conducted to determine the experiences and opinions of African American males who converted to Islam from Christianity while in prison. They were informed that their answers would be kept anonymous and confidential.

In designing the survey questions, initially, the researcher collaborated with Chaplin Lloyd Roberts, Imam Omar Shaheed, and Captain Estelle T. Young. Chaplain Roberts is the Director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) Inmates Services. He worked four years in the pastoral clinics at various locations in the state, five years as pastor of a church, and ten years as chief chaplain at SCDC. Shaheed is the Muslim Chaplain of the SCDC for the entire state. Captain Estelle T. Young of the North Region Section of the Columbia Police Department of Columbia, South Carolina, has 30 years in law enforcement and 20 years in her current position. She provided technical

information about sentencing procedures and processes in South Carolina and helped to determine the order of questions in the demographic section of the questionnaire.

On the basis of these collaborations, in 2005 the researcher began the process of formulating the survey questions. While designing the questions, the researcher took into consideration six scholars' research concerning prison conversion and instruments that probe the topic (Carson, Lapsansky-Werner and Nash, 2005; Feddes, 2006; Kapralos, 2009; Mamiya, 2003). This input will be described in detail later in this chapter. The researcher wrote the survey questions and with the assistance of the statistician, Dr. Corey Amaker, the survey was designed. The survey was reviewed by Dr. George Taylor, Adjunct Professor and member of the researcher's dissertation committee and Dr. Mary Ginn, director of the Union Institute & University (UI&U) Internal Review Board (IRB) in 2006. Minor grammatical and sentence structural issues were highlighted and corrected, but no structural changes were recommended by the aforementioned committee members. The IRB approved the project on December 4, 2008. At that point the survey was submitted to Dr. Douglas V. Davidson who was then the First Core faculty on the researcher's dissertation committee. There were no further recommendations or suggestions submitted; therefore, the survey was deemed ready for distribution.

Prior to the administration of the BSRC, the researcher went through a number of channels to obtain approval to administer the survey. Initially, the researcher sought and gained permission from the director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) to solicit volunteers to participate in the research (Appendix C), the Union Institute & University Institutional Review Board to administer the BSRC survey

(Appendix D), and the Benedict College Institutional Review Board (Appendix E). Once permission was granted from these entities, the researcher contacted prison administrators to arrange a date to administer the BSRC survey (Appendix B).

To prepare for the administration, the researcher compiled survey packets for the respondents which contained a cover letter explaining the study and the BSRC survey (Appendix F – Appendix H). Maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of the data was of the utmost importance to this study. To facilitate anonymity, the names of the respondents were not recorded on any survey instruments. Upon completion of the surveys, respondents returned them to the chaplains and researcher who were present for each data collection session. The chaplains placed the completed surveys into a large manila envelope (Appendix H). Thus, it was impossible to match an individual's survey to any person at any time. The chaplains and researcher served as administrators of the survey. At each scheduled administration of the BSRC survey, the researcher and chaplains provided oral and written instructions for the respondents prior to their actually beginning to complete the survey (Appendix F). The surveys distributed were color-coded per institution before they were administered to the African American males who converted to Islam from Christianity while in prison.

Chief Chaplain Lloyd Roberts was responsible for approval of the researcher's dissemination and collection of the surveys in all four prisons. Chief Chaplin Roberts was also a valued asset during this process because of his work within the prison system and his knowledge of religion. Chief Chaplain Roberts was able to provide first-hand knowledge of the prison arena. His knowledge of the four prisons utilized in the study and their personnel made him an excellent conduit to approve the researcher and

chaplains to distribute the survey to the inmates in the four prisons as well as provide insight into the conversion phenomenon among inmates.

Each group completed the survey within fifteen to thirty minutes. Once all surveys were completed, they were placed in manila envelopes labeled with the name of the institution, according to the color code as the only identifying information. At no time was an individual asked to provide a name or to be identified by name.

Survey

The BSRC survey was a collection of statements and questions used to investigate the research questions regarding the social, psychological, and theological factors of conversion. After synthesizing the research on conversion, the researcher designed the survey items to explore the reasons for conversion. The design of the research items was also impacted by oral and electronic discussions with experts and writings from different scholars. The researcher's objective was to create survey items which would address the three research questions. Chaplain Roberts and Imam Shaheed recommended during the developmental stage that the survey questions be written in such a way that they could be easily understood, meet the educational level of the inmates, and would not include questions designed to reconvert inmates to Christianity (Appendix I).

Therefore, the researcher chose to begin the survey with fixed-choice items which met the concerns of Roberts and Shaheed as well as to assist the respondents in making non-threatening, concise choices. Using this technique, the respondents were asked about experiences, characteristics, attitudes, or opinions in order to assist in generalizing the findings to the larger population. The survey was divided into two sections: Demographics and Conversion Experience.

Section One: Demographics

The purpose of the demographic section was to help the researcher to better understand the population of inmates. All of the participants in this study were selected because they were African American males who had already converted to Islam from Christianity while incarcerated. Therefore, the demographic section did not focus on obtaining information on their ethnicity, gender, or religion. However, this section did focus on their age, marital status, children, prison sentences, and conversion history. The demographic information was not intended to be used to analyze the factors which motivated their conversion.

The demographic section consisted of eleven fixed-choice questions and one yes/no item. These types of questions allowed the participant to respond quickly by choosing the relevant category that applied to him. Two of the fixed-choice questions also allowed participants to provide more information utilizing the "other" category.

The demographic section begins with four initial statements concerning their age, marital status, number of children, and ages of children. Other demographic information respondents were asked involved the types of sentences received (either high crime, misdemeanor, or felony), number of years of current sentence, number of years incarcerated, their affiliation with Christianity prior to conversion, the number of years affiliated with Christianity, which sect of Christianity they belonged to prior to conversion, and of which sect of Islam they are currently a member. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix B.

Section Two: Conversion Experience

The conversion experience section featured items that were designed to solicit information directed toward gaining insight into the respondent's reasons, whether social, psychological, or theological, for converting to Islam. The section encouraged respondents to identify those factors that interested them in the particular religion, factors which sustained their continuance in practicing the faith, and their perceived differences in faith practices between Christianity and Islam. The answers to these items gave some understanding as to why the men converted to Islam.

The open-ended question in Section Two allowed the participants to present their feelings and/or attitudes about their religious conversion experience. This question gave the participants the freedom to elaborate on their experiences and not feel confined concerning their answers.

Section Two also provided insight into their conversion experience through the use of nineteen *Likert*-scale items. A *Likert* scale is one of the most commonly used processes for opinion research to measure attitudes, preferences, and subjective reactions. Subjects/participants are asked to express agreement or disagreement, usually on a five-point scale (Best & Kahn, 1998; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 235). Statements thirteen through thirty-one on the survey utilized a five-point response scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1), *Disagree* (2), *Undecided* (3), *Agree* (4), and *Strongly Agree* (5). The researcher tabulated the number of responses for each item in order to report the frequencies for each item.

Based on the researcher's assessment, the choice of using the *Likert-scale* items best suited this population on the basis of participants' educational level and the time

frame allotted for administration. Because of the time frame allotted by the prison, more information could be gathered utilizing these types of items as compared to open-ended questions. Due to prison restrictions, the researcher could not personally interview inmates because of security and liability issues. In order to personally interview a prisoner, there are specific procedures that one must follow according to the rules and regulation of the SCDC. The researcher would not have had the freedom to engage the prisoners. On the basis of these factors, more quantitative data were collected as compared to qualitative data.

The social, psychological, and theological conversion statements on the survey were not listed in any set pattern. The order in which the statements appear parallels the order in which the question emerged during the investigative research on the topic of inmate conversion. As shown in the following tables, the statements were sorted into three categories in order to answer the research questions concerning the conversion factors. In the social realm, Dannin (2002), Howard (1998), Kusha (2009), and Read and Dohadwala (2003) report that inmates find that the Islamic organization's rehabilitation programs prepare them to reconnect to society through social networks among ex-prisoners, families, and communities, as well as to provide economic strategies for ex-prisoners and their families and strengthen networks among faith-based organizations. Also, Islamic practices can develop discipline, calm, and productive behavior among prisoners and a greater chance that they will not return to crime upon release.

The statements in Table 1 concerning the social factor described personal relationships with other Muslims as well as with the community and prison. This factor

also helped assess their external affiliations with family and community as well as the prisoner's perception of Islam's impact on future crimes.

Table 1. Social Factor Statements

Item #	Social
Q13	An Islamic practice does allow an individual to be mentored.
Q16	Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis.
Q18	Your acceptance of Islam has provided you with a sense of community/family.
Q21	Your conversion to Islam has stimulated emotional maturity more than your previous faith commitment.
Q27	The teachings of Islam discourage committing future crimes.
Q28	The practice of Islam prohibits committing future crimes.
Q29	Your conversion to Islam in prison has fostered a greater appreciation for family ties.
Q30	Your family rejected you after your conversion to Islam during your incarceration.

Regarding the psychological factors, Armstrong (2003), Gillespie (1991), Helms (1990), Leone (2004), and Ullman (1998) assert that conversion takes place through a psychological process in which one seeks empowerment and self determination on the basis of one's self-identity. Ultimately, the psychological dimension is controversial and challenging to classify, as discussed in the review of literature.

The psychological factor statements described ethnicity, belief principles, religious/spiritual disciplines as well as support and accountability. Table 2 lists the psychological statements.

Table 2. Psychological Factor Statements

Item #	Psychological
Q14	Islamic conversion from Christianity connects you to your African ancestral faith.
Q16	Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis.
Q19	Your conversion to Islam does satisfy your resentment towards authority.
Q21	Your conversion to Islam has stimulated emotional maturity more than your previous faith commitment.
Q22	Your conversion to Islam while incarcerated provides you with a sense of personal protection.
Q26	Your conversion to Islam in prison was greatly influenced by fellow Muslim inmates.
Q31	Your church rejected you because of your incarceration.

In the theological realm, Dammer (2002a), Kusha (2009), Shaheed (personal communication, January 30, 2007), and Winchester (2008) point out that incarcerated African American men's conversion centers around issues regarding morality. It also fosters optimism about the future and the possibility of being released. Finally, it provides the framework for them to be embraced by the community of believers both inside the prison and outside the prison upon their release. Inmates are inducted through

an invitation to Jumah, which is Friday prayer (pp. 79-80, 83, 86). As seen in Table 3, the theological factor statements described the doctrine as well as the history of their religious beliefs and practices/rituals.

Table 3. Theological Factor Statements

Item #	**Theological**
Q15	Islamic conversion is viewed as a process of rejecting Christianity.
Q17	Islamic beliefs, doctrine, and creeds are more clearly defined than Christianity's.
Q20	Your conversion to Islam has stimulated intellectual growth more than your previous faith commitment.
Q23	The rituals of Islam are more practical.
Q24	The rituals of Islam are more easily performed.
Q25	The rituals of Islam are better understood.
Q28	The practice of Islam prohibits committing future crimes.
Q31	Your church rejected you because of your incarceration.

One "yes/no" question was designed at the end of the survey to ask the inmates whether or not they would have converted to Islam had they not been incarcerated. This item's objective was to determine the significance of incarceration in the conversion process.

Method of Data Analysis

An analysis of the responses gave the researcher data relevant to the research questions. The researcher tabulated data from the surveys; figures were compiled to determine the number of respondents who answered each question. This frequency distribution, along with the actual surveys, was then shared with Dr. Cory Amaker, statistician for analysis. The data were entered into SAS 9.i software and Microsoft Excel; the completed surveys were stored in a locked file cabinet within the privacy of the researcher's home office. The data collected on the conversion process of African American inmates are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Data Analyses

This section of the dissertation presents the results of the various responses to the survey items to determine factors which influence incarcerated African American men to convert from Christianity to Islam. The Burgess Survey of Religious Conversion (BSRC) was used as the primary instrument to gather data for this research study. The researcher developed this survey (BSRC) based upon findings denoted within the literature and items found on similar surveys of religious conversion. The study centers on three research questions: (1) What social factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam? (2) What psychological factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam? (3) What theological factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam? Each item on the BSRC survey was analyzed, and the results were used to answer each research question.

Section One: Demographics

The demographic section included four statements concerning the respondent's age, marital status, number of children, and ages of children. Also included are three statements concerning the prison sentence, years of sentence, and years incarcerated. And three statements addressed aspects of their affiliation with Christianity prior to conversion. Table 4 through Table 14 show this demographic information. Not all prisoners responded to each question; therefore, a category "No Response" was added at

the beginning of each table. The percentage reported is the percentage of the total sample (82) and not the percentage of the prisoners who responded to that particular item.

Based on the data, the typical inmate that responded was single, between 22 to 35 years of age with 1 to 3 children. He was incarcerated for murder or drug related crimes and is serving a 16 years to life sentence. He has been incarcerated 7 to 12 years and was a Christian 17 to 22 years before converting to Islam.

Eighty-two participants responded to the statement regarding their ages. Forty-three (52.44%) were between the ages of 22 to 35, and thirty-two (39.02%) reported that they were between 36 and 50 years of age. Furthermore, five (6.01%) participants responded that they were over 50 years old, and two (2.44%) participants were ages 18 to 21 years old. See Table 4.

Table 4. Age of Respondents since Last Birthday

Age	N	Percentages
18 – 21 years old	2	2.44
22 – 35 years old	43	52.44
36 – 50 years old	32	39.02
Over 50 years old	5	6.01
Total	82	100.00

Eighty-two of the inmates responded to the statement regarding their marital status. Fifty-five (67.07%) selected *single* as their marital status. Fifteen (18.29%)

indicated *married*. Seven (8.54%) participants responded that they were *divorced*. Yet five (6.10%) stated that they were *separated* from their spouses. See Table 5.

Table 5. Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	N	Percentages
Single	55	67.07
Married	15	18.29
Separated	5	6.10
Divorced	7	8.54
Total	82	100.00

Of the eighty-two inmates, forty-six (74.19%) indicated they have fathered between one to three children, but twenty (24.39%) did not respond to this item. Perhaps they had no children. However, eleven (17.74%) participants indicated that they fathered four to six children, and five (8.06%) had fathered seven to twelve children. See Table 6.

Table 6. Number of Children of Respondents

Children	N	Percentages
No Response	20	24.39
1-3	46	74.19
4-6	11	17.74
7-12	5	8.06
Total	62	100.0

Respondents could select an age range from birth to thirty-five for their children, if they had any. Sixteen prisoners (29.62 %) had children between the ages of 7 to 13, but a higher number, twenty-eight (34.14%), opted not to respond to this item. Of the remaining respondents to answer this item, ten (18.51%) had children from 22 to 35 years old; eight (14.81%), from 14 to 17; and eight (14.81%), from ages 18 to 21. Only four (7.40%) indicated they had children from infant to 3 years old. See Table 7.

Table 7. Ages of Children of Respondents

Age	N	Percentages
No Response	28	34.14
0-3	4	7.40
4-6	8	14.81
7-13	16	29.62
14-17	8	14.81
18-21	8	14.81
22-35	10	18.51
Total	54	100.0

Other demographic information respondents were asked involved the types of sentences received (either high crime, misdemeanor, or felony), number of years of current sentence, number of years incarcerated, their affiliation with Christianity prior to conversion, the number of years affiliated with Christianity, which sect of Christianity they belonged to prior to conversion, and of which sect of Islam they are currently a member. Table 8 through Table 14 show the additional demographic information garnered from the respondents.

The vast majority indicated they were convicted of violent crimes. Nineteen (22.89%) of the respondents indicated they were sentenced to prison for murder, while 21.69% (18) identified they were convicted of drug-related charges. There were 16.87%

(14) convicted of assault of a high and aggravated nature, and 14.46% (12), for felony other. Some of the other felonies listed were burglary and probation violation. Furthermore, no inmates reported being incarcerated for criminal domestic violence, felony sexual predator crimes, loitering, open container of alcohol, or trespassing. See Table 8.

Table 8. Type of Sentence Received

Crime	*n*	Percentages
Assault	7	8.54
Open Container of Alcohol	1	1.22
High Crime Misdemeanor Other	11	13.41
Drugs	18	21.69
Murder	19	22.89
Assault of a High and Aggravated Nature	14	16.87
Other	12	14.46
Total	82	100.0

Furthermore, on the BSRC survey forty-three (53.08%) of the participants indicated serving a current sentence of sixteen years to life. Thirty-one (38.27%) denoted they were serving sentences of seven to fifteen years, with the remaining seven (8.64%) serving sentences of three or fewer years. Only one did not respond to this question. See Table 9.

Table 9. Number of Years of Current Sentence

Years	N	Percentages
No Response	1	1.22
1-3	7	8.64
7-15	31	38.27
16-Life	43	53.08
Total	81	100.0

There were twenty-nine (35.37%) respondents who had been incarcerated 7 to 12 years. Nineteen (23.17%) had been imprisoned for 1 to 3 years, while eighteen (21.95%) had been incarcerated 4 to 6 years. Eleven (13.41%) are serving 17 to 22 years; five (6.10%), 13 to 16 years. See Table 10.

Table 10. Number of Years Incarcerated

Years	N	Percentages
1-3	19	23.17
4-6	18	21.95
7-12	29	35.37
13-16	5	6.10
17-22	11	13.41
Total	82	100.0

The BSRC survey also reveals that sixty-two (76.54%) participants reported being Christian before converting to Islam; nineteen (23.45%) responded *no* to the question. Only one did not respond to this question. See Table 11.

Table 11. Acknowledgement of Christian Faith Before Converting to Islam

Response	N	Percentages
No Response	1	1.22
Yes	62	75.54
No	19	23.45
Total	81	100.0

There were thirty-eight (57.58%) who reported being a Christian for seventeen years or more. Furthermore, nine (13.64%) indicated they were a Christian for 7-12 years, while eight (12.12%) indicated they were a Christian for 13-16 years. Six (9.09%) indicated 1-3 years, and five (7.58%) indicated 4-6 years. Sixteen (19.51%) did not respond to this question. See Table 12.

Table 12. Number of Years a Christian Before Converting to Islam

Years	N	Percentages
No Response	16	19.51
1-3	6	9.09
4-6	5	7.58
7-12	9	13.64
13-16	8	12.12
17-22	38	57.58
Total	66	100.0

Forty-five (64.29%), the majority of those indicating being a Christian, reported being of the Baptist sect. The other primary denominations were as follows: six (8.57%) African Methodist Episcopal, and four (5.71%) United Methodist. Fifteen (21.42%) indicated "Other" as their Christian sect. The answers given were Catholic, Holiness,

Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Traditional Methodist, Non-Denominational, and Sprecents. Twelve (14.63%) did not respond to this question. See Table 13.

Table 13. Sect of Christianity Practiced Before Converting to Islam

Sect	N	Percentages
No Response	12	14.63
African Methodist Episcopal (AME)	6	8.57
Baptist	45	64.29
United Methodist	4	5.71
Other	15	21.42
Total	70	100.0

The data revealed that the most prominent form of Islam is Sunni Islam. Sixty-four (82.05%) reported converting to this sect of Islam, while three (3.84%) reported Shi'ite Islam. Eleven (14.10%) checked the "Other" category. Listed were Salafiyynh and various other categories of Sunni Islam. Four did not respond. See Table 14.

Table 14. Sect of Islam Current Membership

Sect	N	Percentages
No Response	4	4.88
Sunni Islam	64	82.05
Shi'ite Islam	3	3.84
Other	11	14.10
Total	78	100.0

Section Two: Conversion Experience

The conversion experience section featured an open-ended question, *Likert*-scale items, and a yes/no statement that were designed to solicit information directed toward gaining insight into the respondent's reasons, whether social, psychological, or theological, for converting to Islam. The section asks respondents to identify those factors that interested them in the particular religion, those factors which sustain their continuance in practicing the faith, and their perceived differences in faith practices between Christianity and Islam. The answers to these items gave some understanding about why the men converted to Islam. In addition, the differences men observed in the different sects were addressed on the BSRC. The researcher tabulated the number of responses for each item in order to report the frequencies. Furthermore, each statement was assigned a numerical value in order to calculate a mean for each item.

Table 15 through Table 17 display the frequency results for conversion experiences for the social, psychological, and theological factors, in addition to the mean rating for each item. The number of respondents (*N*) refers to the number of prisoners who responded to the particular statement not the total sample (82). The mean is based on the actual number of prisoners who responded to that particular item. For the social factor, the mean ranged from 1.64 to 4.60. The mean ratings for each item range with 5 indicating *Strongly Agree* , 4 *Agree*, 3 *Undecided*, 2 *Disagree* and 1 *Strongly Disagree.* Based on Table 15, the survey results for the Social factor are as follows:

Survey Question 13: Forty-eight (48) strongly agreed, and seventeen (17) agreed that Islamic practice allows an individual to be mentored.

Survey Question 16: Twenty-four (24) strongly agreed, and seventeen (17) agreed that Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis.

Survey Question 18: Fifty-four (54) strongly agreed, and eighteen (18) agreed that their acceptance of Islam has provided them with a sense of community/family.

Survey Question 21: Fifty-five (55) strongly agreed, and thirteen (13) agreed that conversion to Islam has stimulated emotional maturity more than their previous faith commitment.

Survey Question 27: Sixty-one (61) strongly agreed, and eight (8) agreed that the teachings of Islam discourage committing future crimes.

Survey Question 28: Fifty-four (54) strongly agreed, and fourteen (14) agreed that the practice of Islam prohibits committing future crimes.

Survey Question 29: Fifty (50) strongly agreed, and nine (9) agreed that conversion to Islam in prison has fostered a greater appreciation for family ties.

Survey Question 30: Forty-six (46) strongly disagreed, and sixteen (16) disagreed that their families rejected them after their conversion to Islam during their incarceration.

Table 15. Frequency and Mean Results for Conversion Experiences for Social Factor

Item #	Conversion Items for Social Factor	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Q13	An Islamic practice does allow an individual to be mentored.	75	48 (64.0)	17(22.7)	4 (5.3)	3(4.0)	3 (4.0)	4.39
Q16	Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis.	74	24 (32.4)	17 (23.0)	11(15.0)	17 (23.0)	5 (6.7)	3.51
Q18	Your acceptance of Islam has provided you with a sense of community/family.	79	54(68.3)	18 (23.0)	3 (3.8)	0	4 (5.0)	4.49
Q21	Your conversion to Islam has stimulated emotional maturity more than your previous faith commitment.	75	55(73.3)	13(17.3)	1(1.3)	3(4.0)	3(4.0)	4.52
Q27	The teachings of Islam discourage committing future crimes.	77	61(79.2)	8(10.4)	3(3.9)	3 (3.9)	2(2.6)	4.60
Q28	The practice of Islam prohibits committing future crimes.	78	54(69.2)	14(18.0)	2(2.5)	5(6.4)	3(3.8)	4.42
Q29	Your conversion to Islam in prison has fostered a greater appreciation for family ties.	77	50(65.0)	9(11.7)	6(7.8)	4(5.2)	8(10.4)	4.16
Q30	Your family rejected you after your conversion to Islam during your incarceration.	73	3(4.10)	3(4.10)	5(7.0)	16(22.0)	46(63.0)	1.64

Based on Table 16, the mean for psychological factors ranges from 2.08 to 4.52. The survey results for the Psychological factor are as follows:

Survey Question 14: Thirty-two (32) strongly agreed, and seventeen (17) agreed that Islamic conversion from Christianity connects them to their African ancestral faith.

Survey Question 16: Twenty-four (24) strongly agreed, and seventeen (17) agreed that Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis.

Survey Question 19: Twenty-two (22) strongly disagreed, and eighteen (18) strongly agreed that conversion to Islam does satisfy their resentment towards authority.

Survey Question 21: Fifty-five (55) strongly agreed, and thirteen (13) agreed that conversion to Islam has stimulated emotional maturity more than their previous faith commitment.

Survey Question 22: Thirty-three (33) strongly disagreed, and fourteen (14) strongly agreed that conversion to Islam while incarcerated provided them with a sense of personal protection.

Survey Question 26: A total of twenty-five (25) disagreed, and fifteen (15) strongly agreed that conversion to Islam in prison was greatly influenced by fellow Muslim inmates.

Survey Question 31: Forty-one (41) disagreed that their church rejected them because of their incarceration, and seven (7) agreed.

Table 16. Frequency and Mean Results for Conversion Experiences for Psychological Factor

Item #	Conversion Items for Psychological Factor	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Q14	Islamic conversion from Christianity connects you to your African ancestral faith.	76	32(42.1)	17(22.4)	7(9.2)	11(14.8)	9(11.8)	3.68
Q16	Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis.	74	24(32.4)	17(23.0)	11(15.0)	17(23.0)	5(7.0)	3.51
Q19	Your conversion to Islam does satisfy your resentment towards authority.	69	18(26.0)	8(12.0)	5(7.2)	16(23.1)	22(32.0)	2.77
Q21	Your conversion to Islam has stimulated emotional maturity more than your previous faith commitment.	75	55(73.3)	13(17.3)	1(1.3)	3(4.0)	3(4.0)	4.52
Q22	Your conversion to Islam while incarcerated provides you with a sense of personal protection.	74	14(19.0)	10(13.5)	4(5.4)	13(18.0)	33(45.0)	2.46
Q26	Your conversion to Islam in prison was greatly influenced by fellow Muslim inmates.	75	15(20.0)	17(22.7)	5(6.7)	25(33.3)	13(17.3)	2.95
Q31	Your church rejected you because of your incarceration.	61	4(6.7)	3(4.91)	13(21.3)	15(24.6)	26(42.6)	2.08

Based on Table 17, the mean for theological factors ranges from 2.08 to 4.60. The survey results for the theological factors are as follows:

Survey Question 15: Twenty-seven (27) strongly disagreed, and, nineteen (19) agreed that Islamic conversion is viewed as a process of rejecting Christianity.

Survey Question 17: Fifty-six (56) strongly agreed, and twelve (12) agreed that Islamic beliefs, doctrine, and creeds are more clearly defined than Christianity's.

Survey Question 20: Fifty-four (54) strongly agreed, and fourteen (14) agreed that conversion to Islam has stimulated intellectual growth more than your previous faith commitment.

Survey Question 23: Forty-three (43) strongly agreed, and nineteen (19) agreed that the rituals of Islam are more practical.

Survey Question 24: Thirty-four (34) strongly agreed, and sixteen (16) agreed that the rituals of Islam are more easily performed.

Survey Question 25: Forty-three (43) strongly agreed, and nineteen (19) agreed that the rituals of Islam are better understood.

Survey Question 28: Fifty-four (54) strongly agreed, and fourteen (14) agreed that the practice of Islam prohibits committing future crimes.

Survey Question 31: Forty-one (41) disagreed that their church rejected them because of their incarceration, and seven (7) agreed.

Table 17. Frequency and Mean Results for Conversion Experiences for Theological Factor

Item #	Conversion Items for Theological Factor	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Q15	Islamic conversion is viewed as a process of rejecting Christianity.	76	19(25.0)	12(15.8)	3(3.9)	15(19.7)	27(35.5)	2.75
Q17	Islamic beliefs, doctrine, and creeds are more clearly defined than Christianity's.	75	56(74.7)	12(15.8)	5(6.7)	0(0.0)	2(2.7)	4.60
Q20	Your conversion to Islam has stimulated intellectual growth more than your previous faith commitment.	75	54(72.0)	14(18.7)	3(4.0)	2(2.7)	2(2.7)	4.55
Q23	The rituals of Islam are more practical.	75	43(57.3)	19(25.3)	5(6.7)	7(9.3)	1(1.3)	4.28
Q24	The rituals of Islam are more easily performed.	75	34(53.3)	16(21.3)	2(2.7)	14(18.7)	9(12.0)	3.69
Q25	The rituals of Islam are better understood.	74	43(58.1)	19(25.7)	3(4.1)	5(6.8)	4(5.4)	4.24
Q28	The practice of Islam prohibits committing future crimes.	78	54(69.2)	14(17.9)	2(2.7)	5(6.4)	3(3.8)	4.42
Q31	Your church rejected you because of your incarceration.	61	4(6.6)	3(4.9)	13(21.3)	15(24.6)	26(42.6)	2.08

Item 12 was an open-ended statement which asked respondents to provide more details about their conversion experience. Fifty-four inmates provided information regarding their conversion experience. The stated question was "Please write below anything you would like to say about your conversion." Four topics emerged after the responses were analyzed and categorized utilizing themes. The four topics are (1) seeking the truth, (2) believing the truth, (3) becoming enlightened, transformed and disciplined, and (4) recalling previous personal experiences. The participants' responses are quoted verbatim in each section and spelling irregularities were not corrected.

1. Seeking the Truth

Although some of the inmates convert because of seeking to find a religious group that seems to suit them better than their previous religion, some experience personal disillusionment regarding biblical stories that are not factual and because of the inappropriate behavior of a few religious leaders. That truth is an important factor in conversion is evident in several comments by various participants:

1. "I have been seeking the religion of truth. I was with the House of Yahweh before converting to Al-Islam."
2. "I became Muslim because I prayed to God to show me the truth."
3. "I think by me soul searching through all Religious I've become to like Islam the most."
4. "I had numerous questions concerning Islam, nation of Islam, as well as nation of God's and earths and masonry."
5. "I am still making my decision. If I am giving to be converting to Islam but I strongly think I am."
6. "My conversion came as a result of desiring a relationship with the Creator and some what of an in-depth study."

Seeking the truth, to some, was based on a strong desire to have a relationship with Allah, and studying the Qur'an was a major factor that pointed them to him. Islam was the religion that afforded them an opportunity to do an in-depth study in order to seek to find the true religion.

2. Believing the Truth

Many participants embraced Islam because they believed Islam is the truth. The importance of this factor is also corroborated in the written comments of the converts.

Note this belief system in the following statements from them:

1. "It's nothing but the truth and if anyone stepped outside of the box and did there research they would be to."
2. "Islam is the true religion of God and I am his servant."
3. "After reading the Qur'an I decided that this was the religion for me."
4. "I also feel that Islam is Beautiful Religion and through research I have come to know that it is the way of our Father Abraham, his children and all other righteous prophets."
5. "After research I believe that Islam is the final truth for mankind."
6. "Islam is in it's on sense is a truthful Religion and wonderful."
7. "I converted to Islam because after being introduced to it, I seen it to be the truth and the right way of life to achieve my goal to get closer to God. Islam is the true religion of God and I am His servant. I submit to the will of God and ask Him to show me His grace and mercy."
8. "Islam is a very beautiful, healing and complete Religion and should lived to the very fullest in order to get the full effect."
9. "After reading the Qur'an I decided that this was the religion for me. It answered questions about things puzzled me in Christianity."
10. "Islam is the truth. If one sin."
11. "I became Muslim because I prayed to God to show me the truth."

12. "After research I believe that Islam is the final truth for mankind."
13. "I know in my heart I made the right choice."
14. "I was 15teen when I came muslim."
15. "Allah guides whoever he guides."
16. "I converted to Islam because I believe it is the religion that teaches us the proper way to worship our Creator and govern our lives."
17. "When I found out the Al-Qur'an had most of the same prophets and Al-Qur'an tells me what God (Allah-The God) wants us to do."
18. "It is the truth, the only query of life, without doubt, but for only those who believe."
19. "Islam expounds upon the oneness of god. We believe in all of Gods Prophets from Adam to Muhammad, and all of Gods books. It the only religion that identifies with those of other major religions."
20. "All mankind is one and love the god."
21. "I believe in Allah and I learned that God is one and that no man can be god."
22. "My conversion came from my heart. I knew it was something I was missing. Then I found the light of Islam the truth no mystery and my soul connected."
23. "It's a beautiful way of life. Because it teaches the truth that theres one God. I believe I found the one true God."
24. "There is no god worthy of worship, except Allah and Mohammand as the messenger of Allah."
25. "Islam is the truth. If one sincerely study this religion unbiasedly, Allah is certain to open his/her heart to deem, Islam-Allah."

26. "My perception of things in life became more clear to me."
27. "My conversion to Islam was good, because the religion on Islam is a good religion. Islam if for everyone but everyone is not for Islam."

Most of the participants believed that Islam is a beautiful religion to study and in its own sense a wonderful belief system. It is a religion in which one finds the truth and the right way to achieve the individual's desire for spiritual fulfillment. Islam has a tendency to reinforce their belief in God, acknowledging his prophet and accepting whatever it is that comes from God.

3. Enlightenment, Transformation, and Discipline

Islam was described by participants as a religion that brings on enlightenment, transformation, and discipline. Below are the participants' responses regarding the manner in which Islam has affected them in these areas.

1. "It has truly enlightened me."
2. "My conversion came from my heart."
3. "Islam made me a better person."
4. "It has been a phenomenal transformation and has caused my life to change for the best."
5. "eye opening."
6. "You may see us as converts to Al-Islaam, but in reality it's a revert."
7. "Islam is national faith brought me spiritual mental emotional growth."
8. "My conversion to Islam was life changing...and more."
9. Islam has inspired in me to be better and balance in my life."

10. "It has been the best experience of my life. I've learned discipline and the perfect belief in God."
11. "It has honestly helped me re-define a lot of my old way's and to humble me. Basically Islam is the turning road in my life."
12. "It has truly enlightend me."
13. "You get what you give."
14. "Islam is a beautiful religion."
15. "That Allah truly changed my life and that it is truly a blessing that I've been guided to the Deen of Islam."
16. "When I converted to Islam was the best thing that ever happen to me. You know to appreciate things that you would have never. It teaches real family and friends value."
17. "To the last question. I don't think I would've become Muslim in the outside world because I want to do things that are not allowed in Islam. Plus my mental growth in the world would not be at this point it is now. With being incarcerated I've had no choice but to confront my inner-self. In doing so I had to so call "Man-up" and this lead me to Islam."
18. "My conversion to Islam has enlighten my spiritual as well as social being. My family life has broadened and I see things in a better realm. I have a better sense of peace yet at times I fall into the negative state. Islam made me face my iniquities and handle things differently."

19. "Since my conversion, I find myself practicing righteousness more fluently. My perception of life has changed dramatically. I am more prosperous spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically."
20. "This is the best thing that ever happened to me in my life."
21. "Islam made me a better person of understanding."
22. "My conversion to Islam was life changing for me. It's made me a better man than what I once was its also help me get a better grip on life."
23. "Al-Islam is a complete way of life that bring mankind to an spiritual state as African American."

But while many participants remarked that converting to Islam was "eye opening" and has inspired them to be better and to put balance into their lives, they also wrote that practicing Islam has caused them to learn discipline. Discipline is a major factor of becoming a true Muslim. The respondents' statements explained how Islam assisted them to re-define who they are and to turn from their old ways and to be humble. Their perception of things in their "lives becomes clearer" to them. It has been truly enlightening and has given them what they need in order to feel self-worth in their community and among their families. This transforming experience is a beautiful one which helps them to identify who they are and to turn from their old ways.

Converting to Islam led participants to view their experiences as good, because Islam is a good religion. It is not for everyone, but it was for them. They believed that this religion teaches them to appreciate things that they never would have experienced.

The conversion by many participants helped them to place emphasis on loyalty to both God and their families. Islam teaches them the value of families and friends. Many

believed that converting to Islam prompted them to be a better Muslim in the prison, and Islam has prepared them for the outside world. Their family connection has been broadened, and they have seen things regarding their families from a better perspective.

According to many of the participants, they have found themselves practicing righteousness more frequently, and their perception of living righteously has changed them dramatically. They believed that they were becoming more prosperous spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically, and these were the best things that ever happened to them in life.

Their conversion to Islam was life changing, made them better men than they once were and also helped them to get a better "grip" on life. Participants believed that being a part of Islam gives them an opportunity to be a part of something that brings about a wonderful transformation regardless of the crisis situation they are in.

4. Previous Personal Experiences

A variety of prior experiences were noted by the participants' responses indicating their personal experiences leading them to convert to Islam. The participants' written comments below about their personal experiences as a follower of Islam are very riveting:

1. "My Bible studies led me to the Qur'an and Islam- I attended a Baptist school in 9th Grade and I had a problem with what Jesus taught vs. what Paul taught. I was then given a Qur'an and I was forever changed, guided to know the truth to be true and know Falsehood to be false."
2. "Islam was always in my heart; and even though my mother practiced being Christian she taught God is one, and neither did she practice the three."

3. "It's just that I converted because the bible was contradiction, but also Islam so I'm confused."
4. "Growing up my family lived in a church far as bible studies, or services. My family even named me Lazarus, but I heard and studied Islam during my last bid. Also it's more understandable for me to follow, because since I turned towards Islam I understand life more now and more important I understand my reason for live? Serving God."
5. "It has been the best experience of my life. I've learned discipline and the perfect belief in God."
6. "I convert because while in church as child I saw to many preachers teaching one thing and doing other things and I not fearing Allah (God)."
7. "I decided to take a look at Islam after 9/11; although, I wanted to look further into Islam prior. Being incarcerated give me the view I needed to convert, after running across a friend I knew from the street who was Muslim."

Islam had an effect on one participant's (item 2) heart even though his mother practiced being a Christian. Her teachings were a source of confusion for him because she taught God is one, but did not teach the theory of the trinity or practice the three in one belief system. Past teachings on the Bible were a source of contradictions for several who responded.

Another participant (item 4) expressed that he grew up in a family that lived in church, i.e., bible studies or services. Furthermore, he stated that his family even named him Lazarus. But later he had heard about Islam, and after studying the Qur'an, he converted.

The final question on the survey solicited responses from the inmates about whether they thought that they would have converted to Islam had they not been incarcerated. This item's objective was to evaluate the relevance of incarceration as a component of religious conversion. Fifty-four (65.85%) participants responded that they would have converted even if they were not incarcerated. On the other hand, twenty-one (25.61%) responded *no*, that they would not have converted if they were not in prison. Seven (8.54%) men did not answer the question.

Thus on the basis of this study, the survey shows respondents' faith in Islam as a religion that instills one to seek peace and tranquility. Islam has taught also the importance of studying the Qur'an and what it depicts about the characteristics of Allah. Chapter Five will discuss the findings presented.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Results

The Discussion of Results section reviews the current study in light of previous literature as it relates to documented responses of incarcerated African American males who provided insight into their reasons for converting to Islam. The subjects' responses were viewed from a social, psychological, and theological perspective.

Summary

Through the use of the open-ended question, the researcher acquired valuable information because the participants had a venue to provide additional insight concerning their conversion experiences. Of importance to the respondents was seeking the truth in a different religion that suited them better than the faith they were affiliated with upon incarceration. Secondly, they expressed their belief that Islam is the true religion. Thirdly, inmates experienced an enlightenment, which transformed them and provided them with a strict discipline that made them accountable for their actions. Fourth, their previous personal experiences with Christianity, which left them feeling disillusioned and spiritual void, caused them to desire something which Islam provided.

This study found that the social experiential factors that influenced the participants to convert are the mentoring component, which provides a sense of community and family. The teachings of Islam are instrumental in discouraging the inmates from committing future crimes, and it fosters a greater appreciation for family ties. Their families do not have a tendency to reject them after their conversion to Islam

while incarcerated. More community support is provided through Islam than Christianity during their time of crisis.

This study found that specific psychological experiential factors influence the participants to convert. For example, the inmates' emotional maturity is stimulated more than their previous faith commitment through the principles of Islam. Islam also connects them to their African ancestral faith and provides more community support during times of crisis. Inmates were not greatly influenced by fellow Muslim participants to convert to Islam.

This study found that the Islamic beliefs, doctrines, and creeds were the most important theological experiential factors that influence inmates to convert. As Rambo (1993) asserts in his study, within their previous belief system, they experience disappointment, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment (p. 167). Respondents in this study express similar reasons for converting. Because of the appeal of Islamic beliefs and doctrines, participants in this study were more inclined to reject criminal activities after their conversion experience. Zoll's (2005) research corroborates this inclination among Islamic converts to avoid committing future crimes because Islam's principles teach against such actions (para. 12).

Overall, the study found that the typical inmate converted to Islam because of the mentoring as well as the community and family ties that are important factors within the Islamic faith. Community support and emotional maturity were equally important within the conversion experience. In this study participants agree that the reason they convert to Islam is that it connects them to their African ancestral faith.

Social

Mentoring was regarded as a highly social factor because it provides guidance and accountability for the inmates by establishing a support system which gives them an opportunity to find themselves by seeking their identity and purpose for life. Mentoring helped to create a sense of commitment toward their families and a sense of newfound belonging in their communities. Programs such as *da'wah* were instrumental in providing a support system that is effective in rehabilitating and reconnecting them to society outside the prison system by enhancing social networks among ex-prisoners, families, and communities These programs also provided economic success strategies for ex-prisoners and their families; strengthened networks among faith-based organizations; and fostered leadership development among clergy, laity, and members. Through access to this type of program and the benefits provided, inmates were more likely to convert to Islam while in prison. This study supported the need for mentoring programs as noted in the aforementioned researchers, because it was evident that many respondents reviewed this as a deficiency in their previous faith system (Coleman & Cressey, 1999, p. 437; Read & Dohadwala, 2003, pp. 3-4).

Several key factors were identified which assisted in understanding how Islam reconnected the participants to their families and community. The operation of these factors within their prison communities provided a format which could impact their lives both within and outside prison. For the participants in this study, assembling with fellow converts and Islamic believers to study the Quran and to attend Friday's prayer was quite significant. In his observation of the interactions among Islamic converts as an Imam, Omar Shaheed (Muslim Chaplain of the South Carolina Department of Corrections

(SCDC)) also noted the significance of congregating among the inmates. A greater sense of family and community was forged among the followers of Islam, and a system was available to provide the mentoring that many converts craved (Shaheed, personal communication, January 30, 2007). This was one of the highest ranked factors relayed by participants in the study.

Another factor was that Islam provided them with a sense of worth and value to their families and communities. The acceptance of Islam provided them with a greater sense of community and family and helped them foster a greater appreciation for family ties. This is accomplished because they are encouraged to follow Islam. Islam assisted them as individuals to re-define who they are and to turn from their old ways and to become more humble. Through this process their perception of things in their lives become clearer, and they experience a greater sense of feeling of self-worth in their community and among their families. Similar to Gillespie and Ullman, this study's participants expressed a strong sense of change within themselves. They possessed greater self-esteem and had a stronger sense of self-worth (Gillespie, 1991, p. 154; Ullman, 1989, pp.161-166). In turn, they are better able to identify who they are and turn from their old ways and become a better person by emphasizing loyalty to God and the teachings on the importance of valuing families and friends.

When compared to their previous faith, a high percentage of the participants agreed that Islamic teachings and practices discouraged committing future crimes through the stimulation of emotional maturity. Practicing Islam therefore provided a path to living an upright life. As Dammer and Gillespie asserted in their research of conversion experience, the disciplines of the teachings and practices encouraged inmates to become

better individuals and experience a change in their lives for the best, prompting them to be better Muslims in the prisons and better prepared for the outside world. In this researcher's study as well as that of Dammer and Gillespie, the religious practice made a positive effect on both their mental growth and their inner-selves, and, possibly as a result, their family connections broadened. Families were viewed in a better realm, because they found themselves practicing righteousness more frequently (Dammer, 2002b, p. 137; Gillespie, 1991, p. 112).

There are other factors that support participants' conversion experiences because of injustice both socially and economically or because of some type of consequence. These participants did not concur with such. The researcher asserts that from the inmates' responses, being in a crisis situation and converting to Islam give them an opportunity for growth within their religious faith. Based on this study, the inmates' conversion experiences did not concur with the current body of research that inmates convert because of injustice, both socially and economically, or due to some type of consequence. Their conversion was not based on a crisis situation, but was viewed as an opportunity to grow spiritually within their religious faith. Likewise, Fowler (1981) describes the conversion process in his theory of faith development in which participants convert on the basis of moral values, strong awareness of human sin, self-concern, self-deception, as well as personal and social self-interest (pp. 19, 28, 93).

Psychological

The study found that conversion to Islam stimulated emotional maturity more than their previous faith commitment. Participants believed that the study of the Qur'an, the practices of strict discipline, and the principles taught helped them mature

emotionally. The reading of the Qur'an helped them decide that this is the religion which fulfills their spiritual needs. Psychologically, they also believed that the teachings, which urged followers to develop characteristics of God, made them more upright individuals and concurrently encouraged their spiritual growth. Lincoln (1993) expressed in his work the importance for participants to follow, to be governed, and to shape their lives according to the Qur'an, the sacred text. The teachings of the Qur'an focused on the importance of interpreting both sacred texts and applying the doctrine to their everyday life (pp. 108 – 109).

The study found that converting from Christianity to Islam connected participants to their African ancestral faith. From his work with converts, Nyang points out the importance of ancestral ties. He also notes and how participants view Islam as a cultural weapon for them to embrace in the struggle against "racism" issues which imposed a heavy burden of feeling they did not belong (Nyang, personal communication, October 13, 2007). They viewed Islam as the original religion; therefore, they did not consider themselves to be a convert, but a "revert." Because being incarcerated severed participants' relationships, they began to value bonds with family members, friends, and church affiliations.

This study found that Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis, but conversions did not take place because of dramatic events that may have taken place in their lives before incarceration. Participants encountered crisis situations such as family members near death, struggles over ideology, disappointment, dissatisfaction or disillusionment. Barboza (2002) proposes that dissatisfaction can be a vehicle that leads to converting from one religious belief to another. The untimely death

of his 49-year-old mother just before his twenty-second birthday led to his conversion. During her illness, he had cried out to God to save her, but He did not, and this brought about feelings of dissatisfaction. He began to communicate with Allah and found satisfaction and peace within Islamic beliefs and practices. It was all because Islam offered a code of conduct on how to run his daily life and how to communicate with God (praying five times a day) (pp. 233-236). In this context, the study did not concur with other studies that believe that a crisis event is one of the main reasons for convicts to convert. Some evidence suggests conversion can be attributed to group or individual persuasion, conflict or tension. On the contrary, the participants in this study did not view their conversion as being influenced by fellow Muslim participants. The biggest influence was simply being invited to Jumah (Friday prayer).

The study found that when prisoners are discharged, their churches do not reject them because of their incarceration, mainly because during their time away, the church views them as another segment of the population that needs to be evangelized to their faith. In contrast, Islam is providing an important element to their success: the development of a network and the support of believers within the community they are returning to, who are prepared and willing to be responsible for embracing them and making them feel that they belong. Some researchers assert that developing kinship and friendship networks is an important factor that caused individuals to convert. Being involved in these relationships as a follower of Islam is important while the men are prison but also prepares them for the outside world (Rambo, 1998, para. 22; Read & Dohadwala, 2003, pp. 8-29).

The study highlighted that participants disagree with the fact that converting to Islam satisfied their resentment towards authority or that it provided a sense of personal protection. The findings of this study contradicted prior research in this area that participants were converting in order to seek physical protection within the prison system. Instead they were drawn to a religion which offered a support system they embraced because it connected them to their families, provided a home for them, and helped them to find employment. This study has found factors that contradict the conversion experience occurring because of the need for protection; instead, there is a need to develop a deeper sense of spiritual growth. The research of Hamm and Kusha concludes that a primary motivation for converting is the spiritual search for a religion such as Islam that can develop disciplined, calm and productive behavior, even though they did acknowledge that some do convert because of a need for protection (Hamm, 2008, p. 16; Kusha, 2009, p. 7-8).

The study concurred that African Americans not only convert because of being connected to their African ancestral faith, but also to find their identity and self-worth. Furthermore, converters seek a sense of belonging, personal empowerment and self-determination. Additional researchers proposed that the Islamic belief system helped participants go through a psychological process in order that they might feel empowered and possess a sense of self-worth (Armstrong, 2003, p. 19; Gillespie, 1991, p. 154; Ullman, 1989, pp.161-166). According to this study, Islam helped to develop those traits which enable participants to influence others around them or to make an impact in the lives of their families or communities.

The study did not provide evidence that their conversion to Islam satisfied their desire towards authority. Also, there was not a need to view authority figures in a negative role or the need for personal protection as issues because the teachings of Islam points them to focus on God and themselves and not others.

Furthermore, this study found that the application of Islamic religious principles helped change participants' behavior, which has both psychological and emotional benefits for the participants. The benefit for those who practiced the discipline and principles required in Islam is that they have better self-control, which was very instrumental in helping them to avoid confrontation among their peers and to prevent them from committing future crimes. Dannin's and Gillespie's research indicated the importance of self-discipline and self-control which are promoted in the belief system of Islamic participants. As participants became more disciplined, they found it easier to overcome challenges that previously appeared impossible to surmount (Dannin, 2002, p. 169; Gillespie, 1991, pp. 64-65).

Theological

Several important factors from the open-ended questions revealed that the inmates believe that the Islamic beliefs, doctrine, and creeds are more clearly defined than Christianity's. Additionally, the study found, along these lines, that the rituals of Islam are more practical, easily performed, and can be better understood. The soul-searching of the participants as they sought the truth assisted them in their ability to make choices that pointed them to the belief in the doctrine of Allah. Even though most participants had Christian affiliations, their Islamic studies provided them a closer relationship with Allah. Certain aspects of the teachings of their previous Christian faith increased their level of

confusion which resulted in poor understanding as compared to Islam. Martinson's (1994) research asserted that Islam revealed to the participants truth about God and His prophets; Islam is a complete way of life (p. 99).

Conversion experiences transpired from disillusionment while growing up in Christian settings, which led some to seek Islam. The Qur'an reportedly changed their lives forever. The Qur'an guided them to the true teachings so that they can know the truth, be true, and be able to define what was true and what was false. Certain researchers proposed the importance of Islam's doctrine as being simply easier to understand and to govern especially to those participants whose educational levels were at a minimum (Dannin, 2002, pp. 237-238; Howard, 1998, pp. 15-21, 32-38).

According to the findings, participants acknowledged that their conversion to Islam stimulated intellectual growth more than their previous commitment. Their intellectual growth was stimulated through prayer, the discipline of studying, fasting and dietary restrictions. They are encouraged to not only study the Qur'an, but to also seek additional information politically, socially and economically through other media sources, such as the news, television, books and networking. The study found that Islamic teachings encourage participants to stay on the right path which prohibited them from committing future crimes or following their old way of life. Lincoln's and Lumumba's work asserts that Islam is an extreme and rigorous religion because it dominates everyday life, keeps in their mind the importance of religious practices, and teaches not to make a difference between secular and sacred. They believe that following the Law and the Qur'an should be taken very seriously (Lincoln, 1993, p. 108-109; Lumumba, 2003, p. 211).

The study found that participants did not view Islamic conversion as a process for rejecting Christianity, and their churches did not reject them because of their conversion experience. The participants commented on how converting to Islam helped them to center on morality instead of rejection. For them, the crux of Islamic teachings affected their desires to become a better person, to make good choices, and to claim their dignity and self-worth. Other researchers found in their studies that Islam fulfills the participants' desires and expectations about the deity, oneness of God, and that He is to be worshiped through good deeds and discipline (Dammer, 2002a, p. 1375; Kusha, 2009, pp. 7-8; Shaheed, personal communication, January 30, 2007).

Furthermore, the study of participants' conversion experiences to Islam revealed that Islam provides a moral framework from which to rebuild their lives while in prison. The study provided information regarding the importance of mentoring by prison imams, chaplains and peers that support and help participants to develop social, psychological, and theological components. Rambo (1993) proposed that mentoring and intellectual growth are important factors both socially and psychologically in Islamic practice (p. 142). These components are needed in order for the participants to cope more positively with the prison environment, to reduce confrontation with their peers and administrators, and to reduce the progression of violence. Similarly, Lincoln's (1993) research asserts that practicing Islamic beliefs and practices encourages participants to stand completely against any confrontation with their peers. Embracing Islamic teachings contributed to the building of a positive environment within the prison system among inmates which prohibited violent acts (pp. 108-109).

The study also explored the teachings of Allah to the participants. Islamic teachings purported that following Allah would help the converts to adhere to his warnings regarding crime, violence, injustice, aggression, greed and corruption. Spalek and El-Hassan (2007) assert in their study that submission to Allah allowed prisoners to rediscover themselves through spiritual conversion. It was through spiritual conversion among the participants that their needs were met and fulfilled (p. 99). There is a strict code of morality, which can be attributed to the strict theological regimen. Their views change drastically, and their objective is to become more like God, which in turn, positively impacts their behavior. Likewise, Winchester (2008) proposed in his research the importance of participants developing moral values and changing their behavior within Islam. Their expectations were fulfilled through the study of the Qu'ran which provided positive examples morally (p. 1761).

According to participants, believing that Islam is the truth encouraged them to develop characteristics of God. A key trait is to be more loving. Converting to Islam and adhering to its teachings taught them the proper way of life to follow, the correct way to worship, the way to be disciplined, and how to develop a heart that is devoted to God. Fichter and Smith assert that the participants experienced a spiritual conversion which changed their way of life. Their study has pointed out that conversion brings about a change of heart, a turning of the mind away from vice and toward virtue, a relinquishing of the past and an embracing of the future. The theological reason for conversion, according to Fichter and Smith, is to make an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God (heart knowledge) which Islam promotes in order to be a good Muslim. They must have

a change of heart; develop faith, forgiveness, and love; repent, and transform themselves (Fichter, 1976, para. 1-2; Smith, 2001, p. 16).

Finally, the respondents believed that Islam is the true religion that brings them to a spiritual state as an African American, and Islam is the only religion that cares and expounds upon the oneness of God.

To summarize, in this study, religion plays a valuable role in the lives of participants; not only do these respondents feel that Islam gives them organizational support in meeting their personal needs, but while in prison it has also helped them to develop a method of rehabilitation that encourages strict discipline which creates a greater chance that they will not return to crime upon release into their communities. The participants' responses to the social, psychological, and theological factors of this study addressed many of the assumptions the researcher embraced at the beginning of the study that centered around the ideas that Islamic practices allow for personal mentoring more so than Christianity, and, for African American males, Islamic conversion is considered a reclamation of an ancestral faith which forges a sense of community support with others who are in the same situation from whom they can draw strength. Therefore, this study is consistent with the view that Islam impacts the lives of its adherents by restoration of their identity and self-worth. Inmates did not have any negative views regarding their conversion experiences.

Chapter Six

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter contains a summary of the study and important conclusions derived from the data presented in Chapter Four. In addition, a review of the implications, summary, conclusions, and recommendations is included in the section.

Summary

The principal purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influence the conversion of inmates from Christianity to Islam in four South Carolina prisons. The researcher gave attention to three factors: social, psychological, and theological concepts. Through the review of the literature, the history of Islam was examined, components were assessed in other empirical studies, and results were utilized to determine a thematic perspective for the study.

These and other factors and characteristics associated with conversion were identified and addressed in order to understand the phenomenon of conversion within the state's prisons. This study was designed to answer the following questions about the conversion process:

RQ1: What social factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

RQ2: What psychological factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

RQ3: What theological factors encourage incarcerated African American males to convert to Islam?

The success of this study was in gaining access to a large number of prisoners, who willingly shared information about their faith and volunteered their assistance in helping the researcher understand their insight and personal experiences concerning their conversion to Islam.

Statistical analyses were presented in Chapter Four concerning the prisoners' statements. The data gathered were analyzed using quantitative methodology: frequencies and means. The major findings will be discussed by using the three factors for conversion.

Social

1. The mentoring component that is provided by Islam is very important to inmates. Through this mentoring, individuals are able to develop new disciplines and behaviors that help shape them socially and help them to become new persons. Inmates are able to foster relationships that enhance their commitment to the Islamic faith.

2. Islam provided a sense of community and a family component which provide a network of friendships and an affinity with other prisoners. The inmates are incorporated quickly into a homogeneous community within the prison where friendships and relationships are developed.

3. Islam stimulated emotional maturity more than the faith they practiced before incarceration. The group dynamics of Islam results in closeness and promotes emotional maturity to the point that inmates believe that they grow both spiritually and emotionally.

4. The teachings of Islam discouraged and prohibited committing future crimes. The teachings of Islam, combined with mentoring, assist in changing future behaviors. Old ways are redefined and humility embraced which results in life-changing attitudes towards crime.

5. Their conversion to Islam in prison fostered a greater appreciation for family ties, and their families do not have a tendency to reject them after their conversion to Islam while incarcerated. A major core value taught in the Qur'an helps the prisoners to understand the value and connection of family. Islam encourages prisoners to reconnect with family members while in prison.

6. Islam provided more community support than Christianity during their time of crisis. The crisis in this study is incarceration. Over fifty-four percent of inmates who are incarcerated have a sentence of seven years to twenty-two years, which promotes a traumatic experience. In this case, a crisis, incarceration, was instrumental in facilitating their conversion.

Psychological

1. Conversion to Islam stimulated emotional maturity more than their previous faith commitment. Psychologically, they embrace discipline and accountability with the faith. Islam requires a commitment to adhere to the teachings and principles. Islam also encourages the prisoners to become a better person.

2. Islamic conversion from Christianity connects them to their African ancestral faith. Islam has been instrumental in prompting them to believe that their faith connected to their culture, history, and ethnicity. Islam also promotes a better understanding of their origin as African American men living in South Carolina.

3. Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis. The rehabilitative programs offered by Islam are considered to be more effective with people of their faith than Christianity. Islam's strong teaching on discipline and accountability provides a more supportive system.

4. There is *no* agreement among inmates that their conversion to Islam in prison was greatly influenced by fellow Muslim inmates. Some prisoners convert based on the kinship and brotherhood. A prisoner stated that converting was a religious healing. Others were encouraged to attend Friday prayer, *Jumah*, by other Islamic brothers. This provided a time of teaching, fellowship, and kinship.

5. The evidence does not support conversion to Islam satisfied their resentment towards authority or that it provided a sense of personal protection or that they feel their church rejected them because of their incarceration.

Theological

1. Islamic beliefs, doctrine, and creeds are more clearly defined than Christianity's. Furthermore, the rituals are more practical, easy to perform, and better understood. Islam does not have as many sects when compared to Christianity. The sects in Islam are Sunnah and Shi'ites, which result in a single teaching that is practical, simple, and easy to practice. This teaching also makes it possible to embrace Islam's beliefs and practices.

2. Conversion to Islam has stimulated intellectual growth more than their previous faith commitment. The research shows that the rituals of Islam are practical and easily performed, which encourages movement intellectually regardless of educational

level. Islam encourages studying the Qur'an individually and corporately and attending other planned events.

3. The teachings of Islam discourage and prohibit committing future crimes. The teachings of Islam encourage inmates to embrace the teachings of the Qur'an, which encourages them to become better men.

4. A small percentage of respondents did not view Islamic conversion as a process for rejecting Christianity, and their churches did not reject them because of their conversion experience.

Thus, it can be concluded that social variables are perceived to have an impact on conversion because positive communal responses tend to support positive conversion experiences. The components of mentoring, community, family, and family ties are important factors within the Islamic faith. Community support and emotional maturity are equally important within the Islamic faith which promotes a better sense of their beliefs and practices.

The psychological variables were perceived as having an impact on African American inmates converting to Islam. Beliefs and practices were commonly instrumental in their becoming better citizens. The factors that were important were inmates connecting to their ancestral faith, having community support during times of crisis, and stimulating emotional maturity.

The theological variables which were perceived to have an impact on African American males converting to the Islamic faith were that their beliefs, doctrines and creeds are more clearly defined. The rituals are more practical, easily performed and better understood as compared to Christianity's. Through the teachings of Islam and the

promotion of intellectual growth, the men are taught to understand the consequences of committing future crimes.

According to the respondents, similar to Lincoln's (1994) findings, it is evident that Islamic practices for them promoted a kind of moral and social perfectionism, which is available to all who adopt Islam (pp. 108 – 109). The respondents also embraced the term "Brotherhood" to point out the characteristics of love for one another which is another way to promote self-worth and unity. Furthermore, another reason for converting was that they began to feel the need of organizational support for their personal systems of value.

Not only do these respondents feel that Islam gives them organizational support in meeting their personal needs, but while in prison it has also helped them to develop a method of rehabilitation that encourages strict discipline which creates a greater chance that they will not return to crime upon release into their communities. Islamic practices allow for personal mentoring more so than Christianity's, and, for African American males, Islamic conversion is considered a reclamation of an ancestral faith which forges a sense of community support with others who are in the same situation from whom they can draw strength.

Several key factors of this study were similar to the findings of other major researchers who explored religious conversion. One example is the work of Gillespie (1991), who indicated that conversion is not solely an intimate experience but one grounded in and influenced by the social and psychological experiences of the converted (p. 76). Also, this study concurred with Gillespie and Ullman, whose work suggested that the motive for conversion is about self, the identity of one's self, and self-worth

(Gillespie, 1991, p. 154; Ullman, 1989, pp.161-166). Lonergan's (1980) argument that transformation occurs where there is challenge and change, which leads to the development of a better sense of self, helps to explain the positive conversion experiences of the participants (p. 124).

Rambo (1993) contends that conversion takes place based on social or psychological factors. Similarly, in this study, there was a high percentage of participants who viewed their conversion experiences based upon social and psychological components. Rambo pointed out that there is no one cause, no one process, and no one consequence that explains the conversion process (p. 5). He proposed that the conversion takes place when seekers encounter disappointment, dissatisfaction, or disillusionment within their previous religion. This study supported Rambo's theory that key reasons for conversion were related to the disappointment, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment respondents experienced, which led them to seek and convert to another religion which seemed to be flawless (p. 167).

Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (2001) study of racial identity fosters an understanding of the views that Black people hold regarding their blackness, which addressed an essential component of their research. This study's findings also revealed that a religion that authenticated the participants' "blackness" was important in their decision to convert. The researcher's study of the history of the rise of Islam among African Americans supported the relevance of participating in a religion that recognized their African American heritage. Leaders of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X worked to help converts construct a new racial and political identity. This researcher's findings

indicated that Islam encouraged individuals to connect with their ancestral faith; therefore, the respondents were more willing to convert (p. 244).

While some of this study's findings support the work of major scholars, some aspects differ. For example, this study's findings are contrary to ideas gleaned from Ullman's (1989) interview with prisoners who had converted to their newly found faith system, which suggested that conversion is connected to a need for protection, attention, and acceptance by another or by a group of others. Among this study's participants, the need for protection, attention, and acceptance was not found to be a major factor for conversion. Instead, there was a resounding reiteration that conversion took place during the inmates' search for identity, self-worth, and family connections (pp.161-166).

Implications

The results of the study could have important theological and socio-cultural implications. For those who are involved with prison ministry, they must develop a systematic process of understanding Islam in a more rudimentary style. The practitioners of any faith must also evaluate those characteristics unique to the prison system or the prison setting that may positively impact the recruitment and retention of those inmates within the various religions. It appears through the research that the sense of belonging and group dynamics play an important role in the decision to convert. As indicated in the findings, those who have chosen to convert have done so to fill social and communal voids within their lives. One can then theorize that there would be fewer conversions from Christianity to Islam within prisons if Christianity forged stronger social bonds among its adherents. The social bonds or sense of togetherness would instill a feeling of connectedness regardless of the crisis situation that they find themselves within.

Participants have also chosen to convert because they can understand and appreciate the religion of Islam due to its perceived practicality. In order for participants to avoid being lured from a religion that they have followed for a number of years, they need to have a clearer understanding of the doctrine that is affiliated with their religion.

Validity of the BSRC Instrument

While further studies can be done to explore the relationship of the BSRC to prisoners' behavior, the instrument succeeded in tapping into inmate's prediction of future criminal behavior. According to the participants' responses, Islam prevented them from committing future crimes. This is a strong indication of construct validity. Having discipline was a major factor as well as a family structure that promoted a stronger commitment to their faith in Islam.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings in this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

- To increase the reliability of this and similar research studies, obtaining data from the participants during two or more intervals could reap significant comparative findings.
- This study should be replicated using all of the prisons that comprise the penal system of South Carolina.
- This study should be replicated in other states to evaluate similarities and differences in the findings.
- Further research should identify group dynamics variables and examine their relationship to conversion.

- Further research should extend the demographics section to include questions that solicit more information, such as maternal and paternal relationships.
- Further research is needed to determine the impact on the conversion rate from one religious faith to another if there were stronger rehabilitation programs available.
- Further research to examine the importance of women in the lives of the men can be included in future studies.
- Theologians within the Christian faith, practitioners should evaluate their prison ministries to assess their effectiveness in meeting the social needs of incarcerated individuals.
- Further research should be done in the women's prisons to determine why there is lower conversion rate to Islam
- This study focus group was incarcerated African American males. Further research could be done with African American male converts who have not been incarcerated to discern the effect of one's physical environment on the conversion process.
- Future research could examine the relationship between the demographic variables and the conversion experience.
- Further qualitative research should be done (i.e., interviews) with a small population to capture more in-depth information on this topic.

Conclusions

If these recommendations are followed, there will be a better understanding of the dynamics of faith-based concepts within the prison walls among the African American

male population. The researchers can extend their studies to see if the same pattern of conversion is evident within the incarcerated African American women population.

However, as it stands, this study has added to the existing body of research by producing valuable insight into the conversion process among incarcerated individuals because of its focus on a smaller segment within the prison system, African American males who have converted from Christianity to Islam. Because of its focus on the social, psychological, and theological components of the conversion experience, the study has revealed a greater understanding of inherent needs that must be met if a person is to resist the lure to convert to another faith.

Programs must be established that offer mentoring, embrace positive change, build family ties, and inspire devotion to God. If such programs are implemented, there is a greater likelihood that incarcerated men will return to society as men with a greater sense of their self-worth and become productive, law-abiding citizens. One of the greatest successes this study is learning about the need for and potential success of programs with the aforementioned characteristics. Furthermore, for any individual or faith-based group with the objective to change our world for the better, this study has indicated that recognizing the relationship between the conversion experience and the creation of better citizens both behind bars and especially outside prison walls is worthy of future study. Of value is that this study showed specific human needs that were satisfied through conversion from one faith to another. Therefore, the more we delve into understanding religious conversion, the more we learn about peoples' needs in order to be a help rather than a hindrance to their families and society at large.

References

Abdulwaheed Amin, H. (2001). The origins of the Sunni/Shia split in Islam. Retrieve from http://www.islamfortoday.com/shia.htm

Abu Muhammed, K. B. (2005, July/August). A journey to Islam. *Islamic Horizons, 34*(4), 38–39.

African American Males and the Incarceration Problem: Not Just Confined to Prison. Retrieve from http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/14873_Chapter9.pdf

al-Deen, F. T. (2002). Prison and the struggle for dignity. In M. Wolfe & the producers of Beliefnet (Eds.). *Taking back Islam: American Muslims reclaim their faith* (pp. 141-145). New York, NY: Rodale, Inc.

Ali, S. A. (1968). Civilization, Islamic. Islam—History. *Islamic history and culture.* Delhi : Amar Prakashan.

Armanios, F. (2004). *Islam: Sunnis and Shiites.* CRS Report for Congress. Retrieved from http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/testimony/337.pdf

Armstrong, K. (2000). *Islam: A short history.* New York, NY: Random House.

Armstrong, R.-M. (2003, July 12). Turning to Islam: African-American conversion stories. *The Christian Century*, *120*(14), 18–23. http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2877

Asad, T. (1993). Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reasons of power in Islam and Christianity. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press. In D. Winchester Embodying the faith: Religious practice and the making of a Muslim moral Habitus. Social Forces, 86(4), 1753-1780.

Bainbridge, W. S. (1992). The sociology of conversion. In H. N. Malony & S. Southard (Eds.), *Handbook of religious conversion* (pp. 178–191.). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Barboza, S. (2002). My odyssey to Islam. In M. Wolfe & Beliefnet (Eds.), *Taking back Islam: American Muslims reclaim their faith* (pp. 233–236). Emmaus, PA: Rodale.

Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance.* New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe.

Bell, C. (1992). *Ritual theory, ritual practice.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bernard, H. R. (2000). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quanititative approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Best, J. W., & Kahn, J. V. (1998). *Research in education* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bureau of justice statistics. (2007). Prison population counts. In the Prisoners in 2007—Presents data on prisoners under jurisdiction of federal or state correctional authorities on December 31, 2007, collected from the National Prisoner Statistics series. Retrieved from http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=131

Carson, C., Lapsansky-Werner, E. J., & Nash, G. B. (2005). *African American lives: The struggle for freedom.* New York, NY: Pearson Longman.

Chapman, M. L. (1996). *Christianity on trial: African American religious thought before and after Black power*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Clear, T. R. & Sumter, M. T. (2002). Prisoners, prison, and religion: Religion and adjustment to prison. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 35:127–60. In M. S. Hamm Prison Islam in the age of sacred terror. Retrieved from http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/azp035

Clegg III, C. A. (1997). *An original man: The life and times of Elijah Muhammad.* New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Coates, T. (2001, January 1). The last angry man. *Washington Monthly*, *33*(1/2), 39–44.

Cokley, K., & Chapman, C. (2009). Racial identity theory: Adults. In H. A. Neville, B. M. Tynes, & S. O. Utsey (Eds.), *Handbook of African American psychology* (pp. 283–297). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coleman, J. W., & Cressey, D. R. (1999). *Social problems* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Longman.

Cone, J. H. (1970). *A Black theology of liberation* (20th anniversary ed.). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Conn, W. (Fall 1983). Christian conversion: Development and theological reflections on young Thomas Merton. *The Perkins School Journal of Theology,* 228.

Cross Jr., W. E. & Fhagen-Smith, P. (2001). Patterns of African American identity development: A life span perspective. In C. L. Wijeyesinghe and B. W. Jackson III (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development* (pp. 243-268). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Curtis IV, E. E. (2002, Summer). Islamizing the Black body: Ritual and power in Elijah Muhammad's nation of Islam [Abstract]. *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation, 12*(2), 167–196. Retrieved from http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/rac.2002.12.2.167

Curtis IV, E. E. (2006). *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960–1975.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Dammer, H. R. (2002a). Religion in corrections. In D. Levinson (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of crime and punishment* (Vol. 3, p. 1375). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Retrieved from http://academic.scranton.edu/faculty/DAMMERH2/ency-religion.html

Dammer, H. R. (2002b). The reasons for religious involvement in the correctional environment. In T. P. O'Connor and N. J. Pallone (Eds.), *Religion, the community, and the rehabilitation of criminal offenders* (pp. 35–58). New York, NY: Haworth Press.

D'Andrea, M., & Daniels, J. (2001). Respectful counseling: An integrative model for counselors. In D. Pope-Davis & H. Coleman (Eds.), The interface of class, culture and gender in counseling (pp. 417- 466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dannin, R. (2002). *Black pilgrimage to Islam.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

DaSilva, B., Finkelstein, M., & Loshin, A. (1972). *The Afro-American in United States history*. New York, NY: Globe Book.

Demo, D. H., & Hughes, M. (1990). Socialization and racial identity among Black Americans. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 53*(4), 364–374.

Denny, F. M. (1996). Muslims in American corrections. In A. A. Nanji, The Muslim almanac: A reference work on the history, faith, culture and peoples of Islam (pp. 148-157). New York, NY: Gale Research, Inc.

Sanctis, S. (1927/2003). *Religious conversion: A bio-psychological study* (Augur, H., Trans.). New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace.

Dridi, D. (2002, November 19). Converts say Islam has given their lives structure. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer.* Retrieved from http://www.seattlepi.com/local/96224_converts19.shtml

Du Bois, W. E. B. (2004). *The souls of Black folk* (100th anniversary edition). Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. (1982). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Publishing Co.

Erickson, M. J. (1985) *Christian Theology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Feddes, D. J. (2006). *Christian encounter with Islam among African Americans in prison.* Retrieved from http://www.cbi.fm/Center/PDF/Rev.%20Feddes-African%20American.pdf

Fett, C. (1999, March 19). The Black Muslims as antagonists of the American society. Retrieved from http://www.schultreff.de/referate/englisch/r0439t00.htm

Fichter, J. H. (1976, February 18). Parallel conversions: Charismatics and recovered alcoholics. *The Christian Century,* 148–150. Retrieved from http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1830

Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning.* San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.

Fowler, J. W. (2001). Faith development theory and the postmodern challenges. *The international Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 11*(3), 159-172.

Frankel, B. (1994, January 27). Tide of conversion to "a universal religion" *USA Today*, p. 6A. Retrieved from http://www.islamicbulletin.org/newsletters/issue_12/islam.aspx

Fulop, T. E., & Raboteau, A. J. (1997). *African American religion: Interpretive essays in history and culture.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction* (8th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Gillespie, V. B. (1991). *The dynamics of religious conversion: Identity and transformation.* Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity.* New York, NY: Prentice Hall.

Gration, J. A. (October 1983). Conversion in cultural context. *International Bulletin for Religious Research* 7, pp. 157-162. In V. B. Gillespie, *The dynamics of religious conversion: Identity and transformation* (p. 14). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hamm, M. S. (2008, October). Prisoner radicalization: assessing the threat in U.S. correctional institutions. *National Institute of Justice Journal,* (261), 4–19. Retrieved from http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/224083.pdf

Häring, B. (1970). *A theology of protest.* New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Hattery, A. J., & Smith, E. (2007). *African American families.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Helms, J. E. (Ed.). (1990). *Black and white racial identity: Theory, research, and practice.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

"Homegrown: Islam in prison" explores the rise and influence of the Muslim faith in the U.S. penal system. (2007). Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/weta/crossroads/about/press_release_homegrown.html

Howard, J. R. (1998). The making of a Black Muslim. *Society, 35*(2), 15–21, 32–38.

Hudson, D. W. (1992). The catholic view of conversion. In H. N. Malony & S. Southard (Eds.), *Handbook of religious conversion* (p. 115.). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Jackson, S. A. (2005). *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the third resurrection*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

James, W. (2002). *The varieties of religious experience*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Ortner, S. B. (2005). Subjectivity and cultural critique. *Anthropological Theory* 5(1):31-52. In D. Winchester, Embodying the faith: Religious practice and the making of a Muslim moral habitus. *Social Forces, 86*(4), 1753-1780.

Jones, M. J. (1971). *Black awareness: A theology of hope*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

Kapralos, K. J. (2009, February 1). One in 10 inmates behind bars turns to Islam. *HeraldNet.* Retrieved from http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20090201/NEWS01/702019905&news01ad=1

Kusha, H. R. (2009). *Islam in American prisons: Black Muslims' challenge to American penology*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Larson, W. F. (2005). A Christian response to Islam in America. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly, 41*(1), 48–55. Retrieved from http://www.leaderu.com/theology/islaminamerica.html

Leone, M. (2004). *Religious conversion and identity: The semiotic analysis of texts.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Lincoln, C. E. (1993). *The Black Muslims in America* (3rd ed.). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Lonergan, B. & Climacus, J. (October, 1980). Conversion and the doctrine of grace. In V. B. Gillespie, The dynamics of religious conversion: Identity and transformation (p. 124). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Lonergan, B. (1978). Theology in its new context. In W. Conn (Eds.), *Conversion: Perspectives on personal and social transformation* (p. 14). New York, NY: Alba House.

Lonergan, B. (1972). *Method in theology*. New York, NY: Herder and Herder.

Loveland, M. T. (2003). Religious switching: Preference development, maintenance, and change. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42*(1), 147–157.

Lumumba, H. (2003). The impact of al-Islam on the African American population. *Counseling and Values, 47*(3), 210–219.

Mahmood, I. (2002). *Islam beyond terrorists and terrorism: Biographies of the most influential Muslims in history*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Mamiya, L. H. (2003). Islam in America: Problems of legacy, identity, cooperation, and conflict among African American and immigrant Muslims. In A. B. Pollard, III & L. H. Whelchel, Jr (Eds.) *How long this road: Race, religion, and the legacy of C. Eric Lincoln.* New York:NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Martinson, P. V. (1994). *Islam: An introduction for Christians* (Cox, S. O., Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

Merton, R. (1968). *Social theory and social structure.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Morton, J. J. (2004). Embracing Islam: Conversion narratives of American Muslims living in Southern California [Abstract]. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Retrieved from http://ccr.isu.ac.ir/Thesis/026.htm

Neuman, W. L. (2004). *Basics of social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

O'Connor, T. P., & Perreyclear, M. (2002). Prison religion in action and its influence on offender rehabilitation. In T. P. O'Connor & N. J. Pallone (Eds.), *Religion, the community, and the rehabilitation of criminal offenders* (pp. 11–33). New York, NY: Haworth Press.

Ortner, S. B. (2005). Subjectivity and cultural critique. *Anthropological Theory* 5(1):31-52. In D. Winchester, Embodying the faith: Religious practice and the making of a Muslim moral habitus. *Social Forces, 86*(4), 1753-1780.

Price, J. R. (October, 1980). Conversion and the doctrine of grace in Bernard Lonergan and John Climacus. *Anglican Theological Journal* 62. 341.

Rambo, L. R. (1993). *Understanding religious conversion.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Rambo, L. R. (1998, May 29-31). The psychology of religious conversion. Delivered at the International Coalition for Freedom Conference on "Religious Freedom and the New Millenium." Berlin, Germany. Retrieved from http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:ltlKhh2_gAUJ:icrf.com /Conference/Germany

Rambo, L. R., & Farhadian, C. E. (1999). Converting: Stages of religious change. In C. Lamb and M. D. Bryant (Eds.), *Religious conversion: Contemporary practices and controversies* (pp. 23–34). New York, NY: Cassel.

Rashid, S. (1999). Islamic influence in America: Struggle, flight, community. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 19*(1), 7–31.

Read, J. G., & Dohadwala, M. (2003). *From the inside out: Coming home from prison to the Islamic faith.* Retrieved from http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/from%20the%20inside%20out.pdf

Richardson, J. (1993). The active vs. passive convert. In L. R. Rambo, *Understanding religious conversion* (p. 56). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ryrie, C. C. (1995). *Basic theology: A popular systematic guide to understanding biblical truth*. Wheaton, IL: Victory Books.

Sabol, W., (2008, December). *Prisoners in 2007.* Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs: Washington, D.C. Retrieved from http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/p07.pdf

Sabol, W., West, H. C., & Cooper, M. (2009, December). *Prisoners in 2008.* Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs: Washington, D.C. Retrieved from http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov. NCJ 228417/p08 pdf

Saeed, A. (2007). Malcolm X and British Muslims: A personal reflection. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture, 16.* Retrieved from http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art16-malcomxbrits.html

Schmidt, G. (2004). Islam in urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. Retrieved from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2501/is_4_26/ai_n13562970/

Smith, G. T. (2001). *Beginning well: Christian conversion & authentic transformation.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

South Carolina department of corrections profile of inmates in institutional count (including inmates on authorized absences) as of June 30, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.doc.sc.gov/research/statistics.isp.

Spalek, B., & El-Hassan, S. (2007). Muslim converts in prison. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 46*(2), 99–114.

Spencer, R. (2002). *Islam unveiled: Disturbing questions about the world's fastest-growing faith*. New York, NY: Encounter Books.

Spitzer, S. (1975). Toward a Marxian theory of deviance. *Social Problems, 22*(5), 638–651.

Sproul, R. C. (1998). *Essential truths of the Christian faith.* Chicago, IL: Tyndale House.

Spruell, S. (1999, December 9). Our Muslim ancestry revealed. *New York Amsterdam News,* p. 40.

Stone, A. (1994, January 27). There is no one kind of Muslim. *USA Today,* p. A1. Retrieved from http://www.islamicbulletin.org/newsletters/issue_12/islam.aspx

Stricherz, M. (2003, October). Violated felons. *Christianity Today, 47*, 10. Retrieved from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/october/12.22.html

Study of religion. (2009). In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from Encyclopedia Britannica Online: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/497151/study-of-religion

Sutherland, E. & Cressey, D. (2003). Differential association. In P. A. Adler and P. Adler (4th ed.), Constructions of deviance: Social power, context, and interaction (pp. 67-69). Belmont, CA: Wadworth.

Taylor, M. (1999, December 8). *The executed god: The way of the cross in lockdown America.* Inaugural address, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ. Retrieved from http://www-camlaw.rutgers.edu/publications/law-religion/articles/RJLR_1_1_2.pdf

Taylor, M. L. (2001). *The executed god: The way of the cross in lockdown America.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Thomas, J. & Zaitzow, B. H. (2004). Conning or conversion? The role of religion in prison coping. *The Prison Journal,* 86:242–59. In M. S. Hamm in the age of sacred terror. Retrieved from http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/azp035

Turner, R. B. (1997). *Islam in the African-American experience* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Ullman, C. (1989). *The transformed self: The psychology of religious conversion.* New York, NY: Plenum.

Vu, M. A. (2009, February 2). African-Americans most religiously devout group. *The Christian Post.* Retrieved from http://www.christianpost.com/article/20090202/african-americans-most-religiously-devout-group/index.html

Wacquant, L. (2002). From slavery to mass incarceration: Rethinking the "race question" in the US. *The New Left Review, 13,* 41–60.

Wallace, A. F. C. (1956). Revitalization movement. *American Anthropologist* 58, 264-281. In L. R. Rambo, *Understanding religious conversion* (p. 23). New Haven, CT:Yale University Press.

Walvin, J. (1992). *Black ivory: A history of British slavery.* In H. Lumumba, The impact of al-Islam on the African American population. *Counseling and Values, 47*(3), 210–219.

Weber, M. (1958). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (T. Parsons, Trans.). New York, NY: Scribner's.

West, C. (2001). *Race Matters.* In A. Saeed, Malcolm X and British Muslims: A personal reflection. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture, 16.* Retrieved from http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art16-malcomxbrits.html

Western, B., Kleykamp, M., & Rosenfeld, J. (2004). *Economic inequality and the rise of U.S. imprisonment.* Russell Stage Foundation Working Papers Series. Retrieved from http://www.russellsage.org/publications/workingpapers/ineqimprisonment/document

Western, B. & Pettit, B. (1999). Incarceration, employment rates and black-white earnings inequality. Paper #150. In B. Western, M. Kleykamp, & J. Rosenfeld. (2004). *Economic inequality and the rise of U.S. imprisonment.* Russell Stage Foundation Working Papers Series. Retrieved from http://www.russellsage.org/publications/workingpapers/ineqimprisonment/document

Winchester, D. (2008). Embodying the faith: Religious practice and the making of a Muslim moral habitus. *Social Forces, 86*(4), 1753–1780.

Woodberry, J. D., Shubin, R. G., & Marks, G. (2007, October). Why Muslims follow Jesus. *Christianity Today, 5*(10), 82–84.

Woodberry, J. D. (1992). Conversion in Islam. In H. N. Malony & S. Southard (Eds.), *Handbook of religious conversion*, (pp. 22-40). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Young, M. (2001, August 1). What's in a name? - The problem with the "Nation of Islam." Retrieved from http://www.islamfortoday.com/nationofislam.htm

Zeya, U. (1990a, January). Islam in America. *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs,* p. 42. Retrieved from http://www.wrmea.com/backissues/0190/9001042.htm

Zeya, U. (1990b, January). The growing presence of America converts to Islam, p. 42. Retrieve from http://www.wrmea.com/backissues/0190/9001042.htm

Zoll, R. (2005, June 5). American prisons become political, religious battleground over Islam. News wire article from AP Worldstream. Retrieved from http://www.mail-archive.com/osint@yahoogroups.com/msg10354.html

Appendix A

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of key concepts and constructs employed in this dissertation are presented to orient the reader to their specific use in the paper.

Conversion –"conversion is most commonly understood to be a dramatic religious experience. Undoubtedly the emotionalism usually attributed to this event has caused it to be so central in most studies of religious experience. The topic is not usually analyzed in its social setting, and it is seldom understood to be multifaceted. In a sense, each conversion is unique because each occurs in a context. This context may embrace the political, social, economic, and religious centers of a person, but whatever the meaning, it never takes place outside a cultural context of some kind" (Gillespie, 1991, p. 3). Fowler (1981) contends that "conversion has to do with changes in the *contents* of faith (p. 281). In short, Ziyad asserts that "conversion also refers to the reclamation of or a reversion back to the faith that "white imperialist Christian terrorist slaveholders" disallowed on the plantations of the South (M. Ziyad, personal communication, May 22, 2006).

Culture – consists of the language, values, beliefs, rules, behaviors, and physical artifacts of a society. Culture gives us codes of conduct, the proper, acceptable ways of doing things. Culture is particularly apparent when someone questions or violates it. Those who do not believe what the majority believes, value what the majority values, or obey the same rule the majority obeys are likely to experience punishment, psychiatric

attention, or social ostracism (Neuman, 2004, pp.162-192). Furthermore, Helms (1990) points out that "racial consciousness refers to the awareness that 'cultural' is often used as a substitute for 'racial' or 'ethnic' (p. 7). She focuses on the development of racial identity and its cultural difference between White people and Black people. The Black identity theories focused on the "oppressed"—individuals who were in a numerical minority; who had less power, fewer resources, and diminished life-quality access; and who had been the subject of violent physical and psychological torture for centuries. White racial identity models focused on the "oppressors"—individuals who were in the numerical majority; who had power, resources, and countless unearned life privileges; and who were responsible for racism in the United States (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001).

Economics – is an element used in the prison system "to avoid recidivism, not only do ex-prisoners need positive social networks, they also need economic stability. Economic stability allows them to support their families, be productive members of society and strengthen ties to their communities. Islamic organizations work to improve the marketable skills of prisoners to make them more desirable employees upon their release. Job training, job placement and re-entry support groups are promising practices taking place within and outside of prison to assist prisoners and ex-prisoners to find and keep jobs" (Read & Dohadwala, 2003, p. 22).

Ethical Code – of Islam emphasizes (a) the equality of all believers; (b) communal solidarity; (c) truth, honesty, and justice in dealings with Muslims and non-Muslims alike; (d) modesty, humility and clemency; (e) honoring parents and caring for the family; (f) caring for the poor and the stranger; (g) kindliness, especially toward neighbors; and (h) patience in the face of adversity. The code also commands believers

to encourage virtue and discourage wrongdoing, and warns against aggression, corruption, pride, avarice, greed, envy and waste [Electronic version] (Basic Information about Islam retrieved on March 21, 2007).

Faith – trust; body of knowledge that is affirmed or believed by its adherents, central to its understanding of redemption; to trust God. Faith is established upon coherent and consistent reasoning and upon sound empirical evidence (Sproul, 1998, p. 183). "Faith is a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him-or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose" (Fowler, 1981, p4).

Ideology – incorporates beliefs and understandings contained in the media arts, religion, education, government, family, and other institutions where ideas are produced that shape public opinion. Controlled by dominant groups in society who rest on power relationships established through economic, social, and political manipulation of subordinate groups, ideologies perpetuated oppression and justifications for injustice (Weber, 1958, pg. 28-35)

Muslims – individuals who follow the Al-Islam religion are known as Muslims. Similar to Judaism, which is led by rabbis, and Christianity, which is led by ministers and priests, the imams lead Muslims. Muslims subscribe to a religion and a lifestyle that emphasize peace, mercy, and forgiveness. . . . To become a Muslim, the individual must recite the Shahada, "There is no god apart from Allah" and "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah" (Lumumba, 2003, p. 211). One who submits to the will of God, a follower of Islam (Eerdman's Handbook, 2000, p. 417).

Nation of Islam (NOI) - which was found by Wali Fard Muhammed and later headed by the Honorable Elijah Muhammed (El-Amin, 1988). Presently the Nation of Islam is under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan. There is very little doubt that the Nation of Islam has had a major influence on the interest and conversion of African Americans to the religion of Al-Islam. This organization began as the result of the poor conditions of African Americans during the Great Depression in late 1920s and early 1930s (Lumumba, 2003, pp. 210-211).

Oppression – exists when one group has historically gained power and control over value assets of a society (land, labor, wealth, health, knowledge, and political power) by exploiting the labor and lives of other groups. Race, class, gender . . . are systems where oppression occurs (Weber, 2010, p. 23); keeping down by severe and unjust use of force or authority; a systemic denial of basic human rights in the context of race in America; James Cones' view of oppression is primarily a concern about social political oppression because White theologians conveniently did not make social political oppression a part of their theological perspective. (H. Singleton, personal communication, January 31, 2009).

Political Ideology – Its focus is on the political, economic, social, and technological uplift of African Americans, making them aware of the cultural and historical connections to Africa and the effects of Western imperialism and colonialism on all areas of the world in which people of color lived (Turner, 1997, p. 159).

Prisons - are total institutions, where the imprisoned are confined to pre-determined spaces with a schedule of regimented time for all activities; most importantly prisons reduce the person to a dehumanized entity. They are administered at both the

local, state, and federal level. State prisons hold inmates who (a) are convicted of state crimes *in that state;* (b) have sentences of more than 1 year; and (c) are of all custody levels: minimum, medium, maximum, and death row (if the state has the death penalty). Some facilities hold all custody levels in the same prison, and others house only one or two custody levels in the same facility. Federal prisons hold inmates who are convicted of federal crimes. Inmates may be housed in any state that has an appropriate federal prison (African American Males and the Incarceration Problem: Not Just Confined to Prison, p. 236)

Psychological Conversion – spiritual connection, belief and confidence of others' skills; reflection shows that these spiritual attitudes were merely aspirations towards the attainment of an immediate peace, or towards the achievement of a death without fear; there is the sensation of liberation and victory which the convert displays by a powerful and integral joy of the spirit; the convert has a sense, more or less like the sense of vision or touch, of nearness to God. It may be that he feels that God has descended into active intimacy with him, or it may be that he himself has become actively approximated to Him (DeSanctis & Augur, 1927, pp. 29, 170). Every new system of religious ideas stems from older religious beliefs through personal and social changes, which receive either positive or negative connotations depending on what points of view are adopted. Conversion is the most extreme of these personal changes and is usually judged according to opposite (internal and external) points of view (Leone, 2004, p. 54).

Rehabilitation – the process of changing a person's criminal behavior by non-punitive methods. In the 1940s and 1950s, an innovative goal was added: to reform

prisoners through such programs as job training and psychotherapy (rehabilitation). Unfortunately, this new objective often clashed with the prison's other goals. In most cases, prison officials adopted the language of rehabilitation (for example, penitentiaries became "correctional institutions"), but they continued to give the goal of reforming prisoners a low priority. As a result, few rehabilitation programs were effective, and many of them have been dismantled in recent years (Coleman & Cressey, 1999, p. 437).

Sociology - the scientific study of group behavior in society, is employed in this study to help explain the status of incarcerated men, and the social reasons for them to convert to Islam from Christianity. In addition, borrowed from the work of Max Weber in *The Social Psychology of the World Religions* (1946) is the understanding that helps explain conversion from one religion to another. For Weber, the question is what the meaning of a religious revival is; he explores the answer in a discussion of rebirth and redemption. "Rebirth...has meant the acquisition of a new soul by means of an orgiastic act or through methodically planned asceticism. Man transitorily acquired a new soul in ecstasy; but by means of magical asceticism, he could seek to gain it permanently (p. 279). " ...redemption... is...a liberation from distress, hunger, drought, sickness, and ultimately from suffering and death. Yet redemption attained a specific significance only where it expressed a systematic and rationalized 'image of the world' and represented a stand in the face of the world" (p. 280). Class and place in society determine who embraces these two ideas and how they do so.

Shi'ite Muslims – the smallest sect of Islam, whose religious practice centers around the remembrance of Ali, the first true leader of the Muslim community, who is considered an *imam,* a term used among Shiites not only to indicate leadership abilities

but also to signify blood relations to the Prophet Muhammad. Shiite also means "supporters" or "helpers of Ali." Shiite religious practice centers around the remembrance of Ali's younger son, Hussein, who was martyred near the town of Karbala in Iraq by Sunni forces in 680 AD (Armanios, 2004).

Sunni Muslims – the largest denomination of Islam. They are referred to as Ahi-ul-Sunna, the folks of the tradition. The word Sunni comes from the word *sunna*, which means the tradition of the Prophet of Islam. "There are also divisions between those who interpret the Qur'an literally and those who are more liberal in its interpretation (Schmidt, 2004, para. 2). Sunni Muslims embrace the Holy Qur'an as the final revelation of the Muslims, although the Muslims claim that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures were a part of the larger Divine Revelations. This Sunni Muslim's view goes against the teachings of the Nation of Islam, who embraced the teachings and writings of Elijah Muhammad (S. Nyang personal communication, April 15, 2008).

Appendix B

Survey Instrument

Burgess Survey of Religious Conversion

Thank you for participating in this survey. This study is being conducted to determine the experiences and opinions of only African American males who converted to Islam from Christianity while in the institution. The answers and demographic information will be kept anonymous, confidential and will not be released to anyone. Your honesty in completing this survey is greatly appreciated.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Section I. Please respond to each item by checking the appropriate checkbox ☐ . Use a No. 2 pencil only. Erase completely to change a response.

(1) Age on last birthday	**(2) Marital Status**	**(3) Number of children**
☐ 18 – 21 years old	☐ Single	☐ 1-3
☐ 22 – 35 years old	☐ Married	☐ 4-6
☐ 36 – 50 years old	☐ Separated	☐ 7-12
☐ Over 50 years old	☐ Divorced	

5. Identify the type of sentence you received.

High Crime Misdemeanor	**Felony**
☐ Assault	☐ Drugs
☐ Loitering	☐ Criminal Domestic Violent
☐ Open Container of Alcohol	☐ Sexual Predator
☐ Trespassing	☐ Murder
☐ Other	☐ Assault of a High and Aggravated Nature
	☐ Other

(6) Number of years of current sentence	**(7) Number of years you have been incarcerated**	**(8) Were you a Christian before converting to Islam?**	**(9) Number of years you were a Christian before converting to Islam**
☐ 1-3	☐ 1-3	☐ Yes	☐ 1-3
☐ 7-15	☐ 4-6	☐ No	☐ 4-6
☐ 16-Life	☐ 7-12		☐ 7-12
	☐ 13-16		☐ 13-16
	☐ 17-22		☐ 17-22

10. What sect of Christianity did you practice before converting to Islam?

☐ African Methodist Episcopal (AME)

☐ Baptist

☐ United Methodist

☐ Other (Please state) _____

11. Which sect of Islam are you currently a member?

☐ Sunni Islam

☐ Shi'ite Islam

☐ Other (Please state) _____

12. Please write **below** anything you would like to say about your conversion.

Section II. Please respond to each item by checking the appropriate checkbox ☐ that corresponds to your level of agreement. Use a No. 2 pencil only. Erase completely to change a response.

		Ratings				
Burgess Survey						
N	**Description**	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Undecided**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
13	**An Islamic practice does allow an individual to be mentored.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
14	**Islamic conversion from Christianity connects you to your African ancestral faith.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
15	**Islamic conversion is viewed as a process of rejecting Christianity.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
16	**Islam provides more community support than Christianity during times of crisis.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
17	**Islamic beliefs, doctrines, and creeds are more clearly defined than Christianity's.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
18	**Your acceptance of Islam has provided you with a sense of community/family.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
19	**Your conversion to Islam does satisfy your resentment towards authority.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
20	**Your conversion to Islam has stimulated intellectual growth more than your previous faith commitment.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
21	**Your conversion to Islam has stimulated emotional maturity more than your previous faith commitment.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
22	**Your conversion to Islam while incarcerated provides you with a sense of personal protection.**					
23	**The rituals of Islam are more practical.**					

Ratings						
Burgess Survey						
N	**Description**	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Undecided**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
24	**The rituals of Islam are more easily performed.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
25	**The rituals of Islam are better understood.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
26	**Your conversion to Islam in prison was greatly influenced by fellow Muslin inmates.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
27	**The teachings of Islam discourage committing future crimes.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
28	**The practice of Islam prohibits committing future crimes.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
29	**Your conversion to Islam in prison has fostered a greater appreciation for family ties.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
30	**Your family rejected you after your conversion to Islam during your incarceration.**	⑤	④	③	②	①
31	**Your church rejected you because of your incarceration.**	⑤	④	③	②	①

Do you think you would have converted to Islam had you not been incarcerated?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Thank you for your assistance.

Appendix C

IRB Permission to Conduct Research

UNION INSTITUTE & UNIVERSITY

December 4, 2008

Ms. Lillie A. Thomas-Burgess
4517 Faulkland Road
Columbia, SC 29210

Dear Ms. Burgess:

Your proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board.

IRB ID: IRB 00312
Human Subjects Project: *Examining the Dynamics of Conversion from Christianity to Islam Among Incarcerated African-American Men*

Project Purpose: PDE Research Study

Approval Start Date: December 4, 2008
Approval Expiration Date: December 3, 2009

As you conduct your research project, please keep in mind the following:

- The IRB will conduct an annual continuing review process. You will receive notice of the *continuing review* ***two months*** *prior to the expiration of IRB approval. You must respond* to this notice even if your study is completed.
- If you decide to make changes prior to or during your project, you must request IRB approval of the changes well in advance of implementing them.
- If any unanticipated events occur, you must notify the IRB Coordinator within 48 hours. If any subjects have an adverse experience as a result of participating in your project, you must suspend it and notify the IRB Coordinator immediately.
- Finally, please notify the IRB Coordinator when you have completed your project, including recruitment and all data collection.

On behalf of the IRB and the university, I thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Best wishes for the success of your research project.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Ginn

Mary Ginn, Ph.D., Coordinator
Institutional Review Board

c: Dr. Douglas Davidson, Core Faculty
Dr. Patricia Brewer, Dean

440 E. McMillan St., Cincinnati, OH 45206-1925 • 513/861-6400 • 800/486-3116 • TDD 800/486-9968 • FAX 513/861-0779
www.tui.edu

Appendix D

Permission to Use Survey Instrument

Appendix E

Request to Conduct Research

THE SURVEY INFORMATION SHEET

NAME OF INSTITUTION: _____

DATE: _____

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: _____

CHAPLAIN: _____

NUMBER OF SURVEYS GIVEN TO TEST ADMINISTRATOR: _____

NUMBER OF COMPLETED SURVEYS: _____

NUMBER OF UNUSED SURVEYS: _____

NUMBER OF SURVEYS RETURNED TO RESEARCHER:_____

CHAPLAINS LLOYD ROBERTS, OMAR SHAHEED AND REVEREND LILLIE A. THOMAS-BURGESS

Appendix F

Instructions for Survey

INSTRUCTION FOR PARTICIPANTS ABOUT THE CONVERSION FROM CHRISTIANITY TO ISLAM SURVEY IN THE SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION INSTITUTIONS

Thank you for participating in a study that is designed to examine the dynamics of conversion from Christianity to Islam among African American males while incarcerated in the various institutions. The purpose of this survey is to determine the religious experiences and opinions as well as the social, psychological, and theological experiences that Islam affords. Volunteers are asked to complete a brief survey. The survey is comprised of two parts: (1) demographic, a background information section requesting general information about the family, previous church affiliation (Baptist, Methodist, etc.), length of sentence, and (2) questions and statements developed to explain reasons to change an individual's preferred religious choice.

The average time for completing the survey is about 15-30 minutes. Participants are asked to complete the survey manually. Participants are to respond to each item by checking the appropriate check box.

All surveys must be returned to the researcher or chaplain during the time of administration. Please be assured that the answers and demographic information will be kept anonymous, and confidentiality of all participants will be protected. During the administration of this survey, any questions or concerns may be directed to the following persons:

Chaplains Lloyd Roberts, Omar Shaheed or Reverend Lillie A. Burgess
South Carolina Department of Corrections
P. O. Box 21787♦ 4444 Broad River Road ♦ Columbia, SC 29221-1787
Office Phone: (803) 896-8555 ♦ E-mail: corrections.info@doc.state.sc.us

Appendix G

About the Survey

The Conversion from Christianity to Islam Survey consists of two parts. One part of the survey is the *Demographics Section*, which is a general information inquiry on the family, church affiliation, the length of sentence, and the rationale for conversion. The second, and primary, part of the survey is questions and statements that examine the manner in which both Christianity and Islam promote Black self-sufficiency as well as autonomous actions in economic, social, psychological and theological environments. The premise for conducting this research is its prospective contribution to the academic, social, psychological, and theological communities of South Carolina and its potentially far-reaching implications within the research community in general. This survey has been designed by Lillie A. Thomas-Burgess, a researcher at the Union Institute and University, Cincinnati, Ohio. It is devised to examine the socialization and conditioning of Islam that influence the religious preference of participants. This survey investigates reasons for religious conversion basis upon each individual's need for protection, economic gain, or rehabilitation. There is a theoretical likelihood that incarcerated African American men convert to Islam not just because of its belief system, but also as a means of survival.

There is no one right or wrong answer to questions or statements in section two. What is most important about this survey is the opportunity to gain insight into the culture of theology used to provide individuals a climate in which to make intellectual decisions on the basis of beliefs and practices that promote change.

Thank you very much for participating in this survey ABOUT conversion from Christianity to ISLAM!

Appendix H

Instructions for Chaplain

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CHAPLAINS

CONVERSION FROM CHRISTIANITY TO ISLAM SURVEY

Packet Contents

The contents to be hand delivered by researcher and Chaplain at the four different institutions who assist with the administration of the survey. The packet contain the following: (1) *Survey Information Sheet* (identifying information for each specific institution), (2) The participants' information sheet, (3) Christianity to Islam Conversion Surveys, and (4) 100 sharpened, number 2 pencils.

General Instructions for Distribution and Collection of Surveys

1. A Chaplain is named at each institution to facilitate the distribution and collection of the surveys. The surveys disseminated to the participants (African American males who converted in the prison) by the researcher and Chaplain for distribution and collection of the surveys.

2. The researcher and Chaplain will collect the surveys to be placed in an envelope.

3. All Chaplains are to complete the information sheet within the packet and place it into the envelope.

4. A Chaplain delivers the envelope to the researcher.

Thank you for participating in the administration of this study of conversion from Christianity to Islam survey.

Chaplains Lloyd Roberts, Omar Shaheed and Reverend Lillie A. Thomas-Burgess

Appendix I

Steps in Developing a Test

Steps in Developing a Test

STEP 1: **Define the constructs to be measured**. Give careful thought about the specific construct, or constructs, that the test will measure. Consider whether there is a theoretical basis for the constructs.

STEP 2: **Define the target population**. Characteristics of the target population must be considered in making many of the decisions involved in test construction. Therefore, define the target population in detail.

STEP 3: **Review related tests**. Review other tests that measure similar constructs to generate ideas about such matters as test format and methods for establishing validity.

STEP 4: **Develop a prototype.** Prepare a preliminary version of the test (i.e., a prototype). Several published sources provide guidelines on item writing.

STEP 5: **Evaluate the prototype.** Obtain a critical review of the prototype from experts in test development and the constructs being measured. Then, field-test the prototype with a sample from the target population, and do an item analysis on the resulting data.

STEP 6: **Revise the test.** Revise the prototype test based on the evaluations, and field-test the revised version. This cycle of field-test and revision may need to be repeated several times.

STEP 7: **Collect data on test validity and reliability.** Collect evidence to support the reliability of the test's scores and the validity of the inferences that you wish to make from these scores.

Steps in developing a test was designed by Meredith D. Gall, Joyce P. Gall and Walter R. Borg. They are authors of the book entitled *Educational Research: An Introduction Eighth Edition.*