

AMSS 35th Annual Conference

**Cosponsored by
Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT
October 27 – 29, 2006**

Abstract Only – Work in Progress

**“Fard Muhammad in Historical Context: An Islamic Thread
in the American Religious and Cultural Quilt”**

**By: Fatimah Fanusie
(Ph. D Candidate, Howard University, Washington, DC)**

Scholars have paid increasing attention to the contested nature of religious identities, reassessing the conventional understandings of the development and spread of religions. This paper will examine the religious and intellectual background of Fard Muhammad, the Muslim missionary who migrated to the United States and established the Nation of Islam in America. Although scholars examining Islamic growth and conversion processes have emphasized the role of syncretism in facilitating Islamic development in non-Muslim majority countries, scholars of the Nation of Islam have failed to examine it, or its founder, Fard Muhammad, within the context of syncretistic Islamic development. The early history of the Nation of Islam indicates that its founder was an Indian Muslim influenced by the Ahmadiyya movement. The Ahmadiyya movement was an Islamic modernist response to Empire in British India, which used complex strategies to subvert European Christian dominance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paper explores how Ahmadiyya strategists labored to insert a cultural mediator into the American religious and cultural scene of the early 1920s, and suggests that Fard Muhammad cultivated Islamic growth in the United States using Ahmadiyya, Christian Missionary, and Bengali Muslim missionary techniques as part of an Indian Muslim response to Empire. This research will recast the history of Islamic development in America by examining the Nation of Islam as part of an intercontinental pattern of Islamic development among unlettered populations of non-Muslim societies.