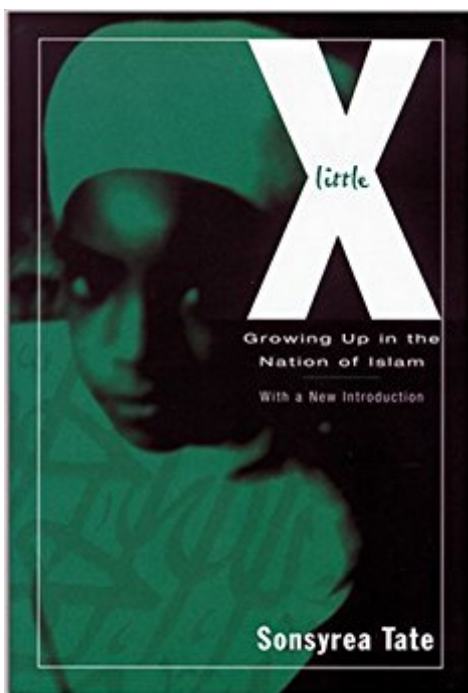


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# Little X: Growing Up In The Nation Of Islam



## Synopsis

In *Little X*, Sonsyrea Tate reveals, through the acute vision and engaging voice of a curious child, the practices and policies of the mysterious organization most know only through media portrayals of its controversial leaders Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Louis Farrakhan. First published in 1997, *Little X* chronicles the multigenerational experience of Tate's family, who broke from the traditional black church in the 1950s to join the radical Nation of Islam, then struggled to remain intact through disillusionment, shifting loyalties, and forays into Orthodox Islam. *Little X* is also an absorbing story of a little girl whose strict Muslim education filled her with pride, confidence, and a longing for freedom, of a teenager in an ankle-length dress and headwrap struggling to fit in with non-Muslim peers, and of a young woman whose growing disillusionment with the Nation finally led to her break with the Muslim religion. *Little X* offers a rare glimpse into the everyday experience of the Nation of Islam, and into a little-understood part of America's history and heritage. Sonsyrea Tate-Montgomery has been a staff writer for the *Virginian Pilot*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Washington Post*. The recipient of four coveted Echoes of Excellence awards from the National Association of Black Journalists, Tate has also worked as assistant to Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton. She currently works as a political reporter for *The Gazette*, a Post-Newsweek publication.

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## Customer Reviews

Her grandparents joined the Nation of Islam in 1952, which makes Sonsyrea Tate a third-generation

member of the Nation. In this fascinating glimpse at life behind the scenes in an NOI family, Tate tells of going to a Muslim school, of the changes in the Nation after the death of its leader, Elijah Muhammad, and of the tensions within her family after her mother converted to Orthodox Islam. For all that it is a profoundly interesting account of growing up in a different culture, in the end Tate's is a quintessentially American story of a child coming of age and finding her own path. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Freelance journalist Tate has fashioned a female coming-of-age autobiography that unveils life in the Black Muslim sect of the 1960s and '70s. She begins with a brief survey of her grandparents' involvement with Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. Heeding this self-proclaimed prophet's call to a life of dedicated discipline, her elders, and later her mother, embark on a religious journey through black society in Washington, D.C. At first, the demand for dignity, respect for education and pride in black achievements spur these converts from traditional black churches to new awareness and contentment. As the author details her adolescence, moving from the rigors of the Black Muslim school to the laissez-faire world of public education, we see a young woman standing with one foot in a misunderstood, restrictive parochial world, and one foot about to set down in the alluringly wide-open, but dangerous, secular world. Tate is at her best in describing the two strongest influences in her life, her mother and grandmother: Both strong women engaged in spiritual quests, they lovingly guide, chide and instruct Tate through the straits of youth. A temperate and sympathetic treatment of an African American family's religious evolution, this is not a sensational expose of the Nation of Islam. While Tate's journalistic style sometimes goes flat, her insights and reminiscences, drawn against a backdrop of dramatic public events, hold the reader's interest. \$40,000 ad/promo; author tour. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It was AWESOME to finally understand the Nation of Islam from a young girl turned extraordinary Woman's perspective. Thanks to Ms. Sonsyrea Tate, I no longer have to guess at what the experience was like. She takes you on a very practical, tangible journey, in her own words.

Memories. The author's reflections gave me the courage to ponder my eldest children's experiences. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad IS Allah's Last Messenger. He taught us to pray and ask Allah to keep us in our Right Mind at all times. The sister is blessed to have received the training and knowledge of self.

Wonderfully written, I'll read this again. Very good story, something I'll get my children to read. Should be turned into a movie.

Sonyrea Tate is an award-winning journalist. This book was selected by the American Library Association as a Best Book for Young Adults in 1998 and was featured in the New York Library Association's Books for the Teen Age 1998 in the "USA Black America" section. She writes in the Introduction to this 1997 book, "my life as an African American Muslim girl was bittersweet. After leaving the Nation, my family journeyed through several interpretations of Orthodox Islam. But in the midst of praying five times a day, something went wrong and I watched my family fall apart. I wasn't sure whether we fell because of our Islam or despite it. I set out to examine my life to find some answers. I hoped that by writing it all down, spelling it all out, it would begin to make sense." Here are some quotations from the book: "While (children in public schools) learned that slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had been a hero, we were taught that he had been a coward." (Pg. 29-30) "Most of the people in the Nation had been vulnerable emotionally and spiritually, and in other ways downtrodden, when they joined the Nation. So it was easy enough to mold them. And those of us born into the Nation simply went along with the program. For the most part." (Pg. 48) (Elijah Muhammad) said the fight for women's liberation was a white woman's battle; that the black woman needed to stay home and take care of her husband and children. The black man, he said, had enough to fight out in the world without having to fight with his woman over women's rights." (Pg. 84-85) "We all heard of brothers getting 'chastised' and winding up mysteriously dead. But none of us made the connection that the deaths and chastisements might have been related." (Pg. 101) "Orthodox Muslims ... didn't consider what Elijah Muhammad taught true Islam because Elijah Muhammad based his teachings on a mix of the Bible, the Quran, and that nationalist philosophy preached by the late Marcus Garvey. In the Temple we were taught to disregard Orthodox Muslims because they refused to accept the fact that we were the real chosen people referred to in the Bible and the Quran." (Pg. 111)

While many texts in religious studies focus on the conversion moment of significant, historical religious figures, few discuss and deal with the issues of a child growing up within a particular system. This book does an outstanding job of addressing just such a need. The areas of children's life and children's culture within the study of religion has gained a great deal with this text. Tate gives the reader an insightful look into the world of a family torn apart by changes in religious

affiliation. She also directly addresses the problems that such changes can cause to the children of such a family. Her account of becoming involved with drugs as a teenager is heartbreaking. To those looking for an insightful and informative look into the Nation of Islam, changes that occurred to the Nation and the practice of Orthodox Islam in the inner cities of the United States will also find the text extremely useful. The book is not a practical guide of Islamic praxis, but more importantly, an account of a young person exploring the limitations of herself and her religious upbringing. Tate's experience with the Nation of Islam as a child, and her first experiences outside the Nation's schools (going into the public school system) should be a wake up call to those who view their worldview as superior to others. Her eventual triumphs in life and her own maturity in accepting religious systems should be inspiring to all who claim to be religiously tolerant.

Ms. Tate writes about her experiences growing up in the Nation of Islam (NOI). She discusses her bizarre education at the Nation of Islam school and her difficult adjustment to the public school system after the NOI school was shut down. In a span of several years she listens as the adults around her complain that the leaders of the NOI are not following their own rules (and there are a LOT of rules). Then she discovers that her parents are also not following the rules; they have a stash of marijuana in their bedroom, which she steals and smokes several times per day. She describes her mother's movement from NOI, to orthodox islam, and finally to the Church of Scientology. Unfortunately the book is repetitive and there are many statements that you will read twice. I don't know where the editor was on this one. This book is written in an adolescent voice and actually reminds me a lot of another memoir: "Red Scarf Girl" by Ji-Li Jiang (about the Chinese Cultural Revolution). A good book for teens and pre-teens.

A sneak peek at the Nation of Islam, the Washington, DC version, through the eyes of little Sonyrea X. The author paints a vivid picture of her world as a child growing up in the Nation with all of its restrictions and structure. With all of the rumors surrounding Elijah Muhammad, the NOI changes following his death, and Sonyrea's mother's move toward Orthodox Islam, it's no wonder the inklings of her departure from the religion arise in the end. I enjoyed this much more than her second book, Do Me Twice.

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