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**NAACP.** See **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**

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## ■ Nancy Drew novels

**Identification** Series of mystery novels for young readers

**Date** Launched in 1930

**Author** Carolyn Keene (pseudonym used by different authors)

*Nancy Drew is the most enduring of the sleuthing heroes of young-adult series books. She has been celebrated by the feminist movement as a role model. Although accurate sales figures for the early volumes of the series are incomplete, publishers claim the books, which have appeared in twenty-five languages, have sold more copies worldwide than the mysteries of Agatha Christie.*

Nancy Drew was the brainchild of Edward Stratemeyer, founder of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, which packaged series books for young people, written to formula by a number of ghostwriters. Stratemeyer's *Hardy Boys* books, from 1927, had been so successful that he planned a similar series for girls. "Nan Drew" was a name he initially proposed, but his publishers, Grosset & Dunlap, settled on "Nancy Drew." Stratemeyer wrote plot outlines and devised titles for the volumes.

Mildred Benson wrote the first four volumes to Stratemeyer's specifications. They were published in 1930, under the name Carolyn Keene. Of the sixteen volumes published during the decade, Benson wrote all but three; Walter Karig became Carolyn Keene for volumes eight through ten. Benson, who received \$125 per book, put much of her own personality into the vivacious, outspoken Nancy. Benson was an energetic midwestern journalist who piloted her own plane. Architectural interests took her to Mayan ruins and canoe trips in Mexico.

From the first published volume, *The Secret of the Old Clock* (1930), to the last volume of the decade, *The Clue of the Tapping Heels* (1939), Nancy Drew lives

a charmed life. She is sixteen years old, relieved of school attendance and parental oversight. Her single parent, Carson Drew, is a busy attorney, preoccupied with his own mysteries, which Nancy sometimes has to solve for him. The housekeeper, Hannah Gruen, provides domestic comforts when Nancy rests from her escapades at the Drew home in midwestern River Heights, an idyllic town untouched by the Depression. Nancy travels backcountry roads in her blue roadster and, when danger threatens, carries her father's revolver. She never lacks for money, wears beautiful clothes, and snacks in picturesque tearooms. Police sometimes ask her for help, and adults generally defer to her. Though she has little interest in romance, her devoted boyfriend is Ned Nickerson, a college athlete. Always ready to lend their support in her perilous exploits are her best girlfriends: Helen Corning, Bess Marvin, and George Fayne. None of Nancy's friends resents her beauty, privilege, and facility with horses, boats, the French language, Morse Code, and anything else that comes her way. Most of all, Nancy is skilled at sleuthing. Though she finds herself frequently caught in underground passages; bound up in deserted cottages; and threatened by vicious dogs, poisonous insects, and an array of desperate criminals, she is never at a loss. Every mystery is solved by the end of each book, along with a teaser promoting the next series volume.

The illustrations of the early books, by Russell H. Tandy, a commercial fashion artist, added much to their appeal and made the original volumes collector's items. Nancy has bobbed hair and wears cloche hats, pearls, and shoes with high heels that are sharp enough to tap out messages when she is held captive. She comes equipped with gloves, handbags, and Art Deco coats. The dust jackets invariably capture Nancy in a dramatic moment, climbing the stairs in a hidden passage or peeping in the broken window of a deserted bungalow.

**Impact** The early Nancy Drew volumes have been attacked for their ethnic stereotypes of Jews, Eastern

Europeans, and African Americans. Later editions attempted to correct these problems, while making Nancy more conventional, if less interesting. Collectors prefer the original volumes. Nancy's adventures in River Heights helped readers escape the deprivations of the Depression and rumors of war. The fact that teachers and librarians found the books objectionable only added to their popularity. Nancy enabled young girls to believe they too could lead lives of achievement and adventure. Among the many accomplished women who have acknowledged the early influence of Nancy Drew are politician Hillary Clinton, opera singer Beverly Sills, television journalist Barbara Walters, former First Lady Laura Bush, and the first three women appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

*Allene Phy-Olsen*

### Further Reading

Mason, Bobbie Ann. *The Girl Sleuth: A Feminist Guide*.

Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1975.

Plunkett-Powell, Karen. *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook*.

New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Rehak, Melanie. *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the*

*Women Who Created Her*. New York: Harcourt, 2005.

**See also** African Americans; Anti-Semitism; Great Depression in the United States; Literature in the United States; Recreation.

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## ■ Nation of Islam

**Identification** American-based Muslim religious organization

**Date** Founded in July, 1930

**Place** Detroit, Michigan

*Established during a period of African American migration out of the South and growing economic disparities between the races, worsened by the Great Depression, the Nation of Islam represents an important strain of African American nationalism. It served the religious and political needs of many African Americans during the 1930's by espousing freedom and justice for black people, and it would become one of the most important African American institutions in later decades as well.*

The exact beginnings of the Nation of Islam (adherents call themselves Muslims) are not clearly recorded. The founder, Wallace Dodd Fard (also

known as Wallace Fard Muhammad), spread word of his variant of Islam through door-to-door sales in Detroit among dispossessed blacks, beginning in July, 1930. Fard initially used the Bible to teach about Islam as the religion of black people in Asia and Africa, and eventually he introduced followers to the Qur'ān, the holy book of Islam. At its inception, the Nation of Islam held religious meetings in private homes. Within three years, as a result of the religion's rapid growth, Fard was holding temple meetings in a hall and had established Muslim schools for children in Detroit.

Mainstream Muslims regard the Nation of Islam as a separatist Islamic sect. Fard's religious doctrines were heavily infused with racial ideologies (though the exact racial lineage of Fard himself remains debated and unknown). Among its tenets, the Nation of Islam teaches that black people are the original humans and Caucasians the result of the workings of a mad scientist named Yakub. Likened to "devils," white people, the Nation of Islam argued, were inferior to black people. Shortly after its founding, the Nation of Islam attracted controversy for some of its more inflammatory racial teachings. Fard taught his followers that one could be ensured salvation through Mecca by sacrificing (murdering) four "white devils." In 1932 and 1933, the Nation of Islam attracted much attention from the Detroit police over this tenet, and rumors of at least one sacrifice persist to this day, though the tenet is omitted from modern teachings.

Fard disappeared from the organization sometime during 1933 or 1934. Speculation arose that he had been murdered. Historians have deemed this unlikely, but stories have circulated about his subsequent whereabouts for decades. Since 1931, Fard had been grooming a convert, Elijah Poole (who later was given a Muslim name, Elijah Muhammad), for ministry in the Nation of Islam. After Fard's disappearance, Muhammad continued to preach throughout the United States, predominantly in the North and in Washington, D.C., proselytizing according to the doctrine he had learned from Fard. These messages were passed down in written form in *The Supreme Wisdom* (1957) and included the belief in one god (Allah), the holy Qur'ān, and the Bible. The Nation of Islam experienced internal fractures during this time and was threatened by outside attempts to weaken the organization, including efforts from the Communist Party USA and the Japanese.