

THE MUSLIMS OF AMERICA

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States; more than one million Americans (Caucasian and African-American) have converted to Islam. While estimates of the number of American Muslims vary significantly (4–12 million), it is safe to say that there are at least four to six million Muslims in America. This means, for example, that there are more Muslims in America than in Muslim countries like Libya, Kuwait, or Qatar. Many believe that in the first half of the twenty-first century, Islam will become the second largest religion in America after Christianity and Judaism.

Muslims were present in America before the nineteenth century. Perhaps 20 percent of the African slaves brought to America from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries were Muslim. However, most were forced to convert to Christianity. It was not until the late nineteenth century that significant numbers of Muslims first became a visible presence in America. Waves of immigrant laborers initially came from the Arab world (from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan). These were followed by Palestinian refugees who fled or lost their homes after the creation of Israel in 1948. In recent decades many more have come from the Middle East and South Asia, leaving their home countries for political or economic reasons. In contrast to Europe, where large numbers of Muslims were immigrant laborers needed by the booming economies of the 1960s and 1970s, in America, many who came were well-educated professionals and intellectuals. Thus, significant numbers of Muslims have joined the ranks of American professionals (physicians, lawyers, engineers, teachers) as well as laborers.

Unity of faith is tested by the American Muslim community's rich (and at times divisive) racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, with groups from the Middle East, Africa, South and Southeast Asia as well as a very significant African-American minority represented. About two-thirds (60%) of America's Muslims are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. The other third comprises primarily African-American converts to Islam plus a smaller percentage of white American converts. The majority of American Muslims are Sunni but there is a strong minority of Shii. These differences are often reflected in the composition and politics of mosques.

Mosques and Islamic centers may now be found not only in major cities but also in small cities, towns, and villages. There are more than 1,100 mosques and Islamic centers in the United States; Chicago alone has more than 500,000 Muslims and fifty mosques. While many mosques incorporate and reflect the diversity of Muslims in America,

the membership of others is drawn along ethnic or racial lines. Thus, more mosques than might seem to be needed have been created in some areas to accommodate differences. In some cities and towns, one can identify Arab, South Asian, Turkish, or African-American mosques.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN ISLAM

African-American Islam emerged in the early twentieth century when a number of black Americans converted to Islam, as a return to more authentic spiritual and cultural roots, and established movements and communities. Islam was seen as part of an original (African) identity, whereas many converts saw Christianity as the religion of white supremacy and oppression, subjugating black Americans from the days of slavery to the present as second-class citizens denied full civil rights. In contrast, Islam's egalitarian ideal in which all Muslims belong to a brotherhood of believers, transcending race and ethnic ties, was very attractive. As a result, quasi-Islamic or "proto-Islamic" groups that combined a selective use of Islamic symbols with black nationalism emerged. Timothy Drew (1886–1929) was perhaps the first black American convert to Islam. He changed his name to Noble Drew Ali and founded the Moorish-American Science Temple in Newark, New Jersey. However, the most prominent and lasting movement was founded by Elijah Muhammad (formerly Elijah Poole) (1897–1975) in the 1930s.

Elijah Muhammad had been the follower of Wallace D. Fard Muhammad, who began preaching in the black ghetto of Detroit in the early 1930s. Recognized as the Great Mahdi or savior, he preached a message of black liberation. Drawing on the Quran and the Bible, he claimed that blacks were not Americans and therefore owed no loyalty to the state; he rejected Christianity and the domination of white "blue-eyed devils," and instead spoke of the "religion of the Black Man."¹¹⁰ Fard wrote two manuals for his movement: *The Secret Ritual of the Nation of Islam* and *Teaching for the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in a Mathematical Way*.

After Fard mysteriously disappeared in 1934, Elijah Muhammad became the leader of the Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad announced that Fard was Allah, and thus God was a black man. Adopting the title of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, he identified himself as the messenger of God. Under his leadership, the Nation of Islam, whose adherents were popularly known as Black Muslims, was redefined and turned into an effective national movement. Elijah Muhammad's mes-

sage of self-transformation and self-reliance encompassed the physical and the spiritual (psychic, political, economic, and dietary) needs of black Americans as addressed in his *Message to the Blackman in America and How to Eat to Live*. Elijah Muhammad denounced the political and economic oppression of blacks by white society, past and present, and its results: black self-hatred, poverty, and dependency. He gave to an often alienated and marginalized people, many of them poor and unemployed, a religious message that offered a sense of identity and community as well as a program of survival, self-improvement, and empowerment within a society and culture that many perceived as hostile, racist, and oppressive.

Elijah Muhammad preached an apocalyptic, millenarian message whose promise was the ultimate Fall of the oppressor, white, racist America and the future restoration of a righteous black community, a "Chosen People." His black separatist nationalism was based upon withdrawal from white society with no political allegiance or participation; black people constituted a separate community or nation. Because the "white man is the devil," Elijah Muhammad taught that life is a war between the forces of good (blacks) and the forces of evil (the white devil), which will culminate in a future battle from which blacks will emerge triumphant and reestablish their global rule under Allah.

Elijah Muhammad preached black liberation and nationalism, black pride and identity, strength and self-sufficiency, black racial supremacy and strong family values. The spirit and ethic of the Nation of Islam was embodied in the phrase, "Do for Self," a doctrine of economic independence based on "a kind of African-American puritanism," which emphasized self-improvement and responsibility for self through hard work, discipline, thrift, and abstention from gambling, alcohol, drugs, and eating pork.¹¹¹

Under Elijah Muhammad's leadership, hundreds of temples as well as small businesses (grocery stores, restaurants, bakeries) were established nationally. The message of black pride, self-respect, and militancy proved particularly attractive to black youth, many of whom were recruited from ghetto streets and prisons. By the 1970s, the Nation of Islam would claim more than 100,000 members.

The Black Muslim Movement diverged significantly from mainstream Islam with respect to a number of basic beliefs. Black Muslims claimed that Allah (God) was human, a black man named Wallace D. Fard, and that Elijah Muhammad (not the Prophet Muhammad) was the last messenger of God. The Nation taught black supremacy and black separatism, whereas Islam teaches the brotherhood of all believ-

ers in a community that transcends racial, tribal, and ethnic boundaries. The Nation did not follow the major Muslim rituals or the Five Pillars of Islam.

Three individuals epitomize the transition and transformation of Elijah Muhammad's Black Muslim Movement: Malcolm X, Wallace D. Muhammad (Warith Deen Muhammad), and Louis Farrakhan.

Malcolm X (1925-65), born Malcolm Little, was the product of the very social conditions (white racism, poverty, broken families, drugs, and crime) that Elijah Muhammad denounced and combatted. His life exemplified the personal and religious transformation for which the Nation of Islam was noted.

Born in Omaha, Nebraska, Malcolm knew little family life and experienced the social dislocation and poverty of many black people in America. He blamed white, racist society for the murder of his father (a Baptist minister and follower of Marcus Garvey), the mental breakdown and institutionalization of his mother, and the breakup of the family's eight children, scattered in separate foster homes. Although Malcolm was a gifted student in primary school, his experience of racism and prejudice led to his alienation and rejection of American society. He became a pimp and a hustler, whose life of drugs and crime in the ghettos of Roxbury, Massachusetts, and later New York City's Harlem led to his imprisonment.¹¹² It was during his incarceration (1946-52) that he educated himself, reading widely in history, politics, and religion. He became convinced that Christianity was the "white man's religion" and that the Bible "[in the] white man's hands and his interpretation of it, has been the greatest single ideological weapon for enslaving millions of non-white human beings."¹¹³ In 1948 he formally turned to Elijah Muhammad and accepted the teachings of the Nation of Islam, attracted by its black nationalism and militant denunciation of American racism as well as by Elijah Muhammad's program of self-help. Malcolm Little became Malcolm X, the "X" symbolizing what he had become: ex-smoker, ex-drinker, ex-Christian, and ex-slave.¹¹⁴

A gifted speaker, dynamic and articulate, and a charismatic personality, Malcolm X rose quickly through the ranks of the Nation of Islam to national prominence. He organized many of the Nation's temples, started its newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*, and became an effective and militant proponent for the Nation of Islam at a time when America was in the midst of the civil rights movement. Elijah Muhammad recognized the talents and accomplishments of Malcolm, appointing him minister of major temples of the Nation in Boston and then Temple 7 in Harlem in mid-1954. Malcolm was named "national representative" of the Nation, second only to Elijah Muhammad.¹¹⁵

From his base in New York, Malcolm X became the most visible and prominent spokesperson for Elijah Muhammad, recruiting new members (bringing among others the boxer Cassius Clay, renamed Muhammad Ali, into the Nation), establishing temples, preaching the message of the Nation of Islam across the country and internationally. By the early 1960s, he was receiving widespread media coverage. His increased involvement in domestic and international politics, as well as his contacts with Sunni Muslims in America and in the Muslim world, led to a gradual shift in his religious/ideological worldview, a development that at times put him at odds with some of the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. During the same period, Wallace D. Muhammad, a son of Elijah Muhammad who had been greatly influenced by Malcolm, was also encountering problems as he questioned some of his father's teachings. Although it was not apparent at the time, this questioning was the beginning of Malcolm's gradual transition (and later the transition of the majority of the Nation of Islam itself) from the community and teachings of the Nation to that of mainstream Islam, or the global Islamic community. While Elijah Muhammad advocated a separation and self-sufficiency that excluded involvement in "white man's politics," Malcolm came to believe that "the Nation of Islam could be even a greater force in the American Black man's overall struggle if we engaged in more action."¹¹⁶ He spoke out forcefully on a variety of issues: the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, solidarity with liberation struggles in colonial Africa. Such statements made him an easy target for those within the Nation who were jealous of his prominence, and as a result he found himself increasingly marginalized. His public comment in November 1963 that the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was "a case of chickens [coming] home to roost" provided the occasion for Elijah Muhammad to silence Malcolm for ninety days.¹¹⁷

In March 1964 Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam to start his own organization and a month later went on pilgrimage to Mecca. Here Malcolm underwent a second conversion—to mainstream Sunni Islam. The pilgrimage brought Malcolm and the religious teachings of the Nation face to face with those of the global Islamic community, vividly exposing their contradictions. Malcolm did not know how to perform Islam's daily prayers (*salat*) nor had he observed the other prescribed practices of the Five Pillars of Islam. Malcolm observed and experienced the pilgrimage with its emphasis on the equality of all believers regardless of race, tribe, or nation and came to realize that "We were truly all the same [brothers]—because their belief in one God removed the 'white' from their minds, the 'white' from their behavior, and the

'white' from their attitude."¹¹⁸ He returned a Muslim rather than a Black Muslim, changing his name to El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. As Betty Shabazz, his wife, would say: "He went to Mecca a Black Muslim and there he became only a Muslim. He felt all men were human beings; we must judge a man on his deeds."¹¹⁹ Similarly, he changed his position on black nationalism to Pan-Africanism, wishing to align African-Americans with their cultural and religious ties in Africa.

On February 21, 1965, El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (formerly Malcolm X) was assassinated as he spoke to an audience in New York. Two members of the Nation of Islam were convicted of the murder. Subsequently Temple No. 7 as well as schools and streets were given his name.

The 1960s were a transitional period for the Nation of Islam. Both Malcolm X and Wallace D. Muhammad (the son of Elijah Muhammad), each in his own way, questioned and challenged some of the teachings and strategy of Elijah Muhammad. Indeed, both Wallace and his brother Akbar Muhammad, a student of Islam who studied in Egypt and Scotland and became a distinguished scholar, were excommunicated by their father. But toward the end of his life Elijah Muhammad himself made the pilgrimage to Mecca and began to modify some of his teachings. By the time of his death, however controversial Elijah Muhammad and the Nation might have been, the mayors of many major American cities publicly acknowledged the constructive contributions of the Nation to their inner cities and communities.

Upon the death of Elijah Muhammad in February 1975, Wallace D. Muhammad succeeded his father as Supreme Minister. Despite their disagreements, Elijah Muhammad had designated Wallace as his successor, and Wallace won the support of his family and others in the leadership as well as that of Elijah Muhammad's most prominent disciple, Muhammad Ali, the former world heavyweight champion, who is revered not only in America but throughout the Muslim world. Within a brief period, Wallace set about reforming the doctrines of the Nation and its organizational structure, simultaneously integrating the Nation within the American Muslim community, the broader American society, and the global Islamic community. The Nation's political and economic programs were redefined and subordinated to its religious identity and mission. Its new reformist and revisionist spirit was also reflected in the renaming of Harlem's Temple 7 as the Malcolm Shabazz Temple 7.

Before the death of his father, Wallace had questioned teachings such as black separatism and the contention that Wallace Fard was God and Elijah Muhammad was his prophet, or as he was often referred to, the Messenger. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the doc-

trines of the Nation, and indeed the Nation itself, were brought into conformity with the teachings of orthodox Sunni Islam. The name of Nation was initially changed to the World Community of al-Islam in the West (WCIW); *Muhammad Speaks* became the *Bilalian News*, named after the first black convert to Islam. Wallace Fard was identified as the founder of the Nation and Elijah Muhammad as the leader who brought black Americans to the Quran, Wallace Muhammad made the pilgrimage to Mecca and encouraged his followers to study Arabic in order to better understand Islam; temples were renamed masjids or mosques and their leaders were called imams rather than ministers; the community observed the Five Pillars of Islam (profession of faith, prayer, fasting, *zakat*, and pilgrimage) in union with the worldwide Islamic community of which they were now members; black separatist doctrines were dropped as the community began to participate within the political process and system; the equality of men and women believers was reaffirmed and women were given more responsible positions in the ministry of the community.

Wallace continued to champion the plight of the urban poor not only as a critic of racism and the failures of the system but also as one who worked within the system for change. However, he streamlined and cut back on the community's business ventures, subordinating them to its religious identity and mission. He quickly emerged as a major Muslim religious leader internationally and at home. In 1977, he met with President Jimmy Carter and has subsequently met with other major political and religious leaders in the United States and the Muslim world.

The end of the 1970s saw the final stages of change completed. In 1978, the WCIW was reorganized as Wallace transferred organizational leadership to an elected council of six imams (leaders) and focused on his role as a religious and spiritual leader. In 1980, as if to signal his and the community's new religious identity and mission, Wallace changed his name to Warith Deen Muhammad, he renamed the WCIW the American Muslim Mission, and the *Bilalian News* became the *American Muslim Journal* (later renamed *Muslim Journal*).¹²⁰

The integration of the American Muslim Mission within the country at large did not lessen its concern with issues of racism and injustice. However, its critique of racism has been articulated within its primary function as a religious community, framed within its twin foci, black identity and following the straight path of Islam:

You can't live in America without hearing the message. The message of white supremacy is everywhere. You are conscious that Jesus is in

a white body even if you don't go to church. . . . Every American knows that apostles and saints and angels are made European by Church society. . . . We are not to see God in a racial image. As long as white (Caucasian) people think that their physical image is in the world as the image of God, and as long as non-white people see and know that the Caucasian image is in the world as the purported image of God, there will be no real coming together and no peaceful meeting of the minds of Caucasians and non-Caucasians.¹²¹

The transformation of the Nation of Islam under Warith Deen Muhammad did not occur without dissent. While the majority of the Nation's temples and ministers accepted Wallace and his reforms, a minority under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan (b. 1933) did not. A bitter foe of the reform of both Malcolm and Wallace, Farrakhan broke with Wallace and the WCIW in March 1978. Maintaining that he and his followers had remained faithful to the message and mission of Elijah Muhammad, he claimed the mantle of leadership of the Nation of Islam. Minister Louis Farrakhan retained the name and organizational structure of the Nation of Islam as well as its black nationalist and separatist doctrines. However, from 1986 onward, while retaining much of the political and economic teachings and program of Elijah Muhammad, he moved the Nation closer to more orthodox Islamic practices and pursued ties with leaders in the Muslim world, in particular Libya's Muammar Qaddafi.

While the militancy and at times anti-Semitic statements of Farrakhan and some of his lieutenants have brought condemnation and criticism, the effectiveness of the Nation in fighting crime and drugs in ghettos and in rehabilitating prisoners has won the Nation praise from many who otherwise would disagree with Minister Farrakhan. A charismatic leader, Farrakhan has denounced the many causes of racism and poverty and articulated the grievances of African-Americans and other minorities, often enhancing his stature even among those who chose not to join his organization. Farrakhan's leadership of the 1995 Million Man March on Washington received widespread media coverage and support, among Christian as well as Muslim leaders and organizations. At the same time, Farrakhan has remained controversial for what is regarded as his strident, separatist message and international connections with militant leaders such as those of Libya and Iran. Though the Nation of Islam has many fewer members than Warith Deen Muhammad's American Muslim Mission, Farrakhan's persona and actions have given him and the Nation a disproportionate amount of visibility and media coverage.

ISSUES OF ADAPTATION AND CHANGE

As we have seen, the Muslims of America, as in Europe, are far from homogeneous. Islam, like Christianity, in America is a mosaic of many ethnic, racial, and national groups: African-American, Arab, Iranian, South Asian, Southeast Asian. American Muslim issues, like those of other religious minorities, are those of identity: assimilation or integration, the preservation and practice of religious faith in an American society based upon Judeo-Christian or secular values, empowerment in American politics and culture. The situation is complicated by the problematic historical relationship between Islam and Christianity, in particular between the West and Muslim societies from European colonialism to what many Muslims perceive to be American neo-colonialism.¹²² Questions of language, community, and faith have spawned deep and significant differences in the Muslim community, exacerbated by difficulties Muslims encounter in an American society in which Islam is often characterized by stereotypes and regarded with fear and distrust.

Islam and Muslim identity in North America reflect the diverse backgrounds of the community: from immigrants who came to America in pursuit of political, religious, or economic freedom to native-born African-Americans seeking social justice. The identity of immigrants has been shaped by the Muslim societies from which they came and their subsequent experience in American society, including contact with other Muslims. Living as a minority in a dominant culture often ignorant of or hostile to Islam, many experience a sense of marginalization, alienation, and powerlessness. They are challenged by an America which, despite separation of church and state, retains a Judeo-Christian ethos. Jewish and Christian holidays are officially recognized holidays, Christian values are regarded as integral to American identity and values. The tendency of some in America, as in Europe, to contrast American (a Judeo-Christian) "national culture" with Islamic values further complicates the process of assimilation. Finally, the American media's depiction of Islam and Muslims as militant or as the principal global threat in the post-Cold War period, equating Islam with extremism and terrorism, as well as America's tilt toward Israel and its checkered record in Bosnia and Chechnya, further disillusion and alienate many.

Religious practice in America can sometimes be difficult for Muslims. American society as yet does not recognize and make the same allowances for Islam and Muslim religious practice as it has for Judaism and Christianity. Despite the fact that Islam has been the third

largest religion in America for many years, it has not enjoyed official visibility. Until recently there were no Muslim chaplains in Congress or the military, Muslim leaders were invisible in the media and politics, *halal* food and restaurants were rare. Although the situation has begun to change significantly in recent years, disparities continue to exist. In Muslim countries Friday is a holiday (as Sunday is in the United States) and Muslims are free to take a longer noontime break to go to the mosque for Friday congregational prayer (*juma*). Many Muslims find it difficult to do this in America. While some manage to pray at a mosque on Friday, the majority who must work attend mosque on Sunday.

Both mosques and mosque leaders (*imams*) have been transformed by the American experience. In contrast to many parts of the Muslim world, mosques in America serve not only as places of worship but also as community centers. For many, Sunday at the mosque or Islamic center is a long day of congregational prayer, education ("Sunday school"), bake sales, and socializing. Influenced by the American Christian custom of Sunday school, children receive religious instruction. Similarly, imams in America are not only responsible for the upkeep of mosques and leading of prayers, but often take on the activities of their fellow clergy of other faiths, ranging from counseling to hospital visits.

Observing the fast of Ramadan can be a greater hardship in America than in Muslim societies. In contrast to many Muslim countries where the hours of work are shortened or adjusted and employers are more flexible in their expectations, the great Islamic religious holidays, which, like Christmas and Hanukkah, are times of community celebration and family gathering, have no status or recognition in America. Thus many Muslims have difficulty observing them fully through activities ranging from attendance at mosque to family visits. Traditionally these holidays are often celebrated over several days as families travel to their home cities and villages to visit and exchange gifts.

Integral to the experience of Muslims in America, like that of all religious or ethnic minorities, is the question of integration or assimilation. How is it possible to be fully American in a society often characterized as Judeo-Christian or secular and at the same time retain Muslim faith and identity? If the majority of Americans need to realize that Muslims are indeed "us," many Muslims also struggle with the nature of their identity, the relationship of faith to national identity: Are they Muslims in America or American Muslims? For American Muslims, as for American Jews, how to simultaneously retain one's distinctive religious identity and values and also become part of the

majority culture, part of the fabric of society, is a major challenge in the "American melting pot."

Some Islamic leaders have encouraged immigrants to return to their homelands and work there for the creation of Islamic governments. Others discourage assimilation and advocate the creation of Islamic communities within the broader American non-Islamic society. Still others encourage engagement and peaceful coexistence, emphasizing the common religious and social values and interests shared by Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

Isolationists practice their faith privately and worry about losing their children to the attractions of Western culture. Many other Muslims, however, build institutions (mosques, schools, professional and social associations) to establish Islam as part of the American religious and cultural landscape. African-American Muslims are highly visible and active in asserting their Muslim identity, while focusing on the issues facing inner-city America in particular: racism, poverty, crime, violence, and drugs. The diversity among and within Muslim communities raises issues of interpretation, law, and cultural identity.

Islamic law (Sharia) provides the ideal blueprint for Muslim life. A primary question facing Muslims in America (like Muslim minorities elsewhere) is thus: Can Muslims live in a non-Muslim territory? For many raised in Muslim-majority countries, this is a particularly vexing question.¹²³ Muslim jurists in the past, writing during the days of expansionist Islamic empires, encouraged Muslims to migrate from non-Muslim areas lest they contribute to the strength and prosperity of non-Muslim states. However, while the juristic ideal was to live in a Muslim territory, Islamic jurisprudence did allow Muslims to live outside the *dar al-Islam* (Islamic territory) provided they were free to practice their religion. In the late twentieth century, this has become a major issue as Muslim minority communities have become a global phenomenon. If some religious leaders continue to counsel emigration from non-Muslim territories back to Muslim lands, many others have defined the conditions under which Muslims can live permanently as loyal citizens in their newfound homes as well as preserve their faith and identity.

Connections of American Muslims to their homelands in the Middle East and the broader Muslim world have been maintained and reinforced. International religious organizations funded by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states as well as by Libya have supported the building of mosques and schools, the teaching of Arabic and Islam, the distribution of religious literature, the hiring of imams, and frequent visits of religious leaders from overseas. While such measures can strengthen

and culturally dependent upon foreign sources and deter the Americanization of the Muslim community, the building of independent, indigenous religious institutions, and the formation of local religious leaders and scholars.

Many Muslim communities, like Christian and Jewish communities before them, become dependent on foreign-born and -trained religious leaders who are brought to the United States with little desire to acculturate and who are ill equipped to respond rather than react to the challenges of life in America. They reinforce a "ghetto mentality," living, acting, and teaching as if they were in Cairo, Mecca, or Islamabad rather than in New York, Detroit, or Des Moines. To address these concerns, American Muslims have created *Fiqh* (law) councils. Rather than continuing to be dependent on foreign-born muftis, who are regarded as out of touch with the local conditions and circumstances of Muslims in North America, they seek to provide new interpretations of Islamic law to provide answers to many of the modern problems raised by life in modern American society. The thinking of educated members of the American Muslim community as well as advice from Islamic legal scholars around the world are brought to bear in formulating fresh legal opinions (*fatwas*) on such matters as the legality of business projects under Shariah law, the propriety of Muslims voting in a non-Muslim society or for non-Muslim candidates, and the acceptability of Muslims observing *juma* (community) prayer on Sunday instead of Friday. In this way the dynamism of Islamic law, its historic ability to provide answers appropriate to changing and diverse socio-historical contexts, is preserved.

In North America, as in France, the wearing of the *hijab* (headscarf) has become a legal and religious issue. In France the primary focus was on Muslim students; in America it has been on Muslim teachers. Although Muslims are equal members of the societies in which they live, societies that protect freedom of religion, in fact as minorities their rights are often compromised or denied. Thus, for example, in America despite the guarantees of freedom of religion, the courts have at times refused to regard the wearing of the hijab as symbolic of personal religious conviction, but instead regarded it as a threat of proselytism in the public sphere. For many Muslims, this raises profound questions about Muslim identity in America: Should they attempt to integrate into American society or would they be better off remaining alienated from society in order to preserve their Islamic identity?

In recent years, American Muslims have increasingly sought to respond rather than simply react to life in America, seeking, like Jews and other minorities before them, to develop institutions that are indige-

Islam to a new context can be seen in mosque architecture, the appointment of local (rather than foreign) imams, the creation of mechanisms to obtain legal opinions (*fatwas*) from local rather than overseas muftis, and the creation of Muslim public affairs organizations that promote and lobby for Muslim religious rights and community interests. While some are content simply to complain about misunderstanding, prejudice, and stereotyping, others seek to counter, respond to and correct inequities. Muslim educational associations monitor textbooks and teaching about Islam to ensure accuracy and objectivity; public affairs organizations monitor and educate the media, legislators, and the general public; Islamic information services develop and distribute films, videos, and print publications on Islam and Muslims in America to further better understanding; in some communities Islamic schools (primary and secondary) have been created; teaching materials and syllabi on Islam and Muslim life have been created to be used in classes for children and adults at mosques and in schools. While great headway has been made, the resources, numbers, and impact of such projects still remain relatively small. Whether Muslim communities in America will be able to supply the financial and human resources necessary to build a strong self-sustaining community in the twenty-first century remains an important unanswered question.

The religious situation of American Muslims can be especially difficult for the younger generation. Many have parents, raised in overseas Muslim societies, who equate cultural practices and norms with the principles of Islam. Their children face the challenge of both fitting into American society and retaining their Islamic identity, of distinguishing between what is mandated by religion and the "foreign" cultural baggage of their parents. Religiously, educationally, and socially, they are sometimes caught between the religious interpretations and cultural practices of their parents and an American society that is Judeo-Christian or secular in its mores and practices. Participation in school and society requires a response to an American society in which drinking alcohol, dating, and co-ed activities, from gym classes and sports to dances and other social events, are common.

If some have questioned whether Islam and Muslims can accommodate or assimilate, the challenge to American liberalism and pluralism, long accustomed to think of itself as Judeo-Christian or secular, is equally accommodation and tolerance of "others," or true religious and political pluralism. Do we judge Muslims, as we do Christians and Jews, by the standards of their religion, or do we judge Islam by the claims and behavior of a few individuals or extremist fringe groups? In reacting to press coverage of the World Trade Center bombing, Albert

Mokhiber, then president of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, observed:

We know that all religions have their fanatics but this is not an indictment of the religion, rather a statement about those individuals. That distinction is not only being missed, but is being misused. Has anybody asked if David Koresh and followers represented all Christians?

He warned, "What we are seeing, perhaps, is another form of anti-Semitism—but in this case it's anti-Muslim and anti-Arab."¹²⁴ The rush to judgment that mistakenly identified Muslims as responsible for the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma vividly illustrated the tendency to view Islam and Muslims through the prism of religious extremism and terrorism.

The Islamic resurgence, and in particular the impact of revolutionary or radical Islam, has contributed to a climate of distrust and suspicion. This has fed a tendency to equate the actions of a radical fringe, who manipulate and exploit religion to justify their actions, with Islam itself. The same approach would be unthinkable in the context of Judeo-Christian relations. No one would think or dare to equate Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, or those who bomb abortion clinics and call themselves the army of God with Christianity; nor would they equate the extremism of the Jewish Defense League, the slaughter by a Jewish settler of more than twenty Muslims at Friday prayers in the Hebron mosque, or the assassination of Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a religious zealot with Judaism.

If many in the West did not become aware of Islam and the Muslim world until the 1970s, increasingly they have been confronted by the realization that Islam is not just a religion "out there" but is also very much here. Muslims are not followers of a religion only in faraway places but in the city-centers of Western societies. If Muslims are challenged to define their roles as minorities in non-Muslim majority states, non-Muslims in the West are equally challenged to accept a religious as well as a demographic reality. Islam is a major religion in the West and Muslims are integral members of Western societies.

Conclusion

In recent years, many in the West have become more aware of Muslim faith and politics. Islam has become a visible presence and force in Muslim societies and in the West. The impact of contemporary Islamic revivalism in Muslim countries and upon Western politics has en-

hanced awareness of Islam and of Muslim politics enormously. Islamic revivalism has often meant government manipulation of Islam to delay or control elections, to ban or restrict political parties, to impose press and media censorship, or to suppress political and religious dissent. The vast moderate majority of Islamic activists, despite their growth and achievements, have often been overshadowed by a radical minority who assassinate, kidnap, and bomb in the name of Islamic political and social justice.

To speak of Islam in the world today requires a focus not only on Islam in Muslim countries but also on Islam *in* the West. However different these experiences may initially appear, the common thread is the vision of Muslims grappling with change. Despite differing contexts, Muslims today, whether in the Muslim world or in the West, continue to struggle (as do all religious peoples) to define the relationship of faith to life: What does it mean to be a Muslim in contemporary society?

Several important points must be remembered when viewing developments in the Muslim world. The process of modernization in the West extended over several centuries. The establishment of modern states, the creation of a sense of national identity and political legitimacy, the development of appropriate economic and social institutions took time and experimentation. The process was accompanied by heated debates, riots, and revolutions (the American, French, and Russian). Similarly, the accommodation of religion and modernity (religion and science, revelation and reason) and the resolution of issues of modernization (the changing family, role of women in religion and society, sexual, corporate, and medical ethics) continue to challenge the faith and unity of modern Judaeo-Christian communities. Issues of political and cultural identity and of religious values remain important concerns in the West today, inspiring a variety of religious reform and revivalist movements: among them, Christian and Jewish revivalism in the United States and liberation theology and Christian-based communities in Central America.

The political and economic realities of the post-World War II independence period have hampered the process of self-determination in many parts of the Muslim world that have had only decades, rather than the several centuries enjoyed by the West, to cope with the challenges of modernity. Until political and educational reforms permit a more broad-based, consensual approach to the development of indigenously rooted national political systems and the resolution of issues of Islamic reform and change, Muslim governments and societies, like much of Middle East politics, will remain fragile, precarious, and potentially volatile.