

== Chapter 1 ==

The Development of Ethno-Racial Muslim Communities in the United States

MUSLIMS in North America come from many places, including the United States. Their histories are varied, and their identities diverse and changing. Processes of individual and community identity formation and change like those we are witnessing now in the United States are not new to followers of this major world religion.

Within a century of the birth of Islam in seventh-century Arabia, there were contending interpretations, social groups, and sources of legal authority within the evolving Islamic community. Yet an identifiable “core” Islamic way of thinking and acting, based on the example and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 C.E.), developed over time. This core comprises the five “pillars” of Islam: the profession of faith (there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet); the offering of prayers five times a day; alms-giving, or zakat; fasting for the month of Ramadan; and the obligation to go on pilgrimage to the sacred center, Mecca, once in one’s life if one can afford it. Islamic law, or shari’a, was eventually represented by several major legal traditions or schools, but it developed on the foundations of the Qur’an, delivered from Allah to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel, and the collected traditions, the hadith.

Islam is not a monolithic entity; its beliefs and practices are not the same throughout the world. An early battle (at Karbala in 680 C.E.) over the Caliphate—the political leadership of the rapidly growing Muslim community—produced a lasting split between Sunni (the majority) and Shi’a Muslims. The former vest leadership in friends of the Prophet, and the latter in his family. There are many other divisions within Islam. (See appendices 1 and 2 for some important organizational features of Old World and American Islam mentioned in this essay.)

As Islam moved to new places and confronted older religions, Muslims conquered or coexisted with them and their non-Muslim adherents (Asad 1986; Bulliet 1994). Such regional interactions in the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia, China, and now North America have shaped the ways in which this decentralized and nonhierarchical religion is practiced throughout the world. The religion has no centralized clergy, and mosques operate independently of each other.

Thus, Muslims in the United States understand and practice Islam in ways strongly shaped by the American historical context. The umma, or universal Muslim community, may be the goal sought by Muslims, but the reality is that *asabiyya*, or group solidarity and experience, shapes their everyday lives. Muslims in the United States have been defined and redefined by voices both internal and external to Muslim communities. Those definitions reflect, among other things, the complex relations among members of the ruling class and those being ruled in the American political context. Situating Muslim communities in the socioeconomic structure of the United States is crucial to their analysis, as is tracing their transnational networks and affiliations.

Muslims now constitute an important part of North American society. Islam may be the fastest-growing religion in the United States, poised to displace Judaism and become second only to Christianity in number of adherents. Its growth is mainly due to the rapid influx of immigrants and their relatively high birthrate, but the number of African American, Euro-American, and Hispanic converts is increasing too. It is difficult to know exactly how many Muslims there are in the United States: in 1990 estimates ranged from 1.2 million to 4.6 million; in 1992 the American Muslim Council put the figure between 5 million and 8 million (Nu'man 1992, 11). The U.S. Census Bureau collects no information on religion, and there are no reliable nationwide surveys that can estimate the Muslim population comparable to those done by the National Jewish Population Survey.¹

The American Muslim "community" at the turn of the twenty-first century is strikingly diverse, and the number of Muslims in various categories is debated. One attempt to categorize and count Muslim Americans (Nu'man 1992) put African Americans at 42 percent, South Asians at 24.4 percent, Arabs at 12.4 percent, Africans at 6.2 percent, Iranians at 3.6 percent, Southeast Asians at 2 percent, European Americans at 1.6 percent, and "others" at 5.4 percent. Another report (Ba-Yunus and Siddiqui 1999) put "Americans" at 30 percent, Arabs at 33 percent, and South Asians at 29 percent. There are also differences of belief and practice between Sunni and Shi'a, as well as among Shi'a groups like the Ithna 'Ashari (most Iranis) and the Nizari Isma'ilis (followers of the Aga Khan). There are those whose Islamic identity is contested, groups like the

Ahmadis and the Druze (Haddad and Smith 1993). Then there are the Sufis, whose charismatic Sunni and Shi'a leaders teach mystical strands of Islam; the Sufis in the United States are from very diverse backgrounds, and many are Euro-American converts (Hermansen 1997). (Appendix 1 gives some idea of the major divisions and groups among Muslims.)

The three largest American Muslim groups—African Americans, Arabs, and South Asians—are very different from each other. The identities of African Americans, who constitute a large percentage of the Muslims in the United States, have been historically shaped by race and class struggle. Although there were Muslims among the Africans brought to the United States as slaves, the religion did not survive slavery times. African American Muslim history starts again in the early twentieth century, when blacks migrating to the North encountered religions new to them and drew upon them to create alternatives to Christianity and white America. The largest immigrant groups are Arab Muslims and South Asian Muslims. The Arabs—coming from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco (and in smaller numbers from other North African states, Saudi Arabia, and various Persian Gulf states)—are far more diverse in terms of national histories and colonial pasts. Arabs have been coming to the United States since the late nineteenth century, but until the 1960s the majority were Christians. South Asian Muslims, from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, have a largely shared subcontinental history, and most have come since the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. While Arabic-speakers often dominate as imams, or clerics, in mosques and educational settings, South Asians have a higher socioeconomic profile and are arguably more privileged in American society.

African American Muslims

The first Muslim “immigrants” to the United States were African Muslim slaves (Diouf 1998; Austin 1997), but many accounts of Muslims in America either overlook them or do not put them first. Although at least 10 percent of the African slaves were Muslims (Austin 1984), they have been historically neglected most likely because “there is no evidence of any African Muslim slave family that survived slavery and maintained Islam as a way of life” (Nyang 1998, 10–11; but see Gomez 1994).²

In the early twentieth century, some African Americans learned about Islam and developed their own versions of it. We know less than we would like about the founders of these movements, Noble Drew Ali of the Moorish Science Temple in 1913 (Curtis 2002a, 47, questions this date) and W. D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam (NOI) in 1930 (see appendix 2). These movements have been separatist

ones and are best explained, not by the spread of Islam to the United States, but by American religious history and African American economic and social history, and particularly by contacts between blacks and immigrant Arabs in Detroit and elsewhere (Nance 2002).

The fascinating history of these early-twentieth-century African American Muslim movements is only now being set out clearly. These movements owed much to the dynamic pan-African movements at the turn of the century and to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which featured mosques and practicing Muslims as part of the exposition and the Parliament of Religions.³ Furthermore, like movements in Turkey and Iran that blended Freemasonry with Islam, the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam both drew on Masonic and Shriner rituals, symbolism, and members (Allen 1998; Schmidt 1998, 37–40; Zarcone 2000; Dannin 2002a, 15–34; Curtis 2002a, 45). Noble Drew Ali wrote his own *Holy Koran*, drawing on esoteric texts published in the 1920s, while Elijah Muhammad became more familiar with “Old World” Islamic teachings and texts. Both movements rejected the Negro or slave identity: Noble Drew Ali declared that “Moorish Americans” were Asiatics, and Elijah Muhammad proclaimed his followers to be “Asiatic-Blacks” (Essien-Udom 1962, 34; Marsh 1984, 45; Curtis 2002a, 56–64).

The best intellectual histories of African American Islam are by Edward Allen Jr. (1998), Robert Dannin (2002a, 1996b), and Edward E. Curtis IV (2002a); along with Aminah Beverly McCloud (1995, 1996), Richard Brent Turner (1997), and Mattias Gardell (1996), they and others show that this group of Muslims differs from immigrant Muslims in many respects and is also differentiated internally. Islam for African Americans was part of the landscape opened up by migration from the South between World Wars I and II, and it offered new possibilities for racial and national identification. African American Muslim history is part of the broader development of black nationalism and the search for roots and for alternatives to white Christian America; this growing collective consciousness fueled the movements of Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey, and many others. Curtis (2002a) illuminates the meanings of Islam to key African American Muslim leaders, tracing the tensions between particularistic and universalistic visions of Islam in the thinking of Noble Drew Ali, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Wallace D. Mohammed, and Louis Farrakhan. Dannin (2002a) traces specific communities and mosques in both urban and rural settings, highlighting the passionate strivings for new ways of life and the evolving versions of Islam.

African American Islamic movements had some early input from South Asian Muslim missionaries to the United States, particularly the Ahmadiyyas, or Ahmadis.⁴ Ahmadi missionaries from India started the

long process of drawing these movements closer to dominant Sunni traditions by providing English translations of the Qur'an to African American Muslims and teaching them about the five pillars of Islam in 1920; the Ahmadis published the first English-language Muslim newspaper in the United States in 1921. The Ahmadi expansion overseas was formative for Islam in Nigeria, Trinidad, and other places besides the United States, and its significance cannot be overestimated, although its influence has diminished as its Islamic status has been challenged.⁵ In the United States, African American converts were largely unaffected by overseas opinions of the Ahmadis (Lincoln 1961, 221; Turner 1997, 109–46). However, the partnership between African Americans and Ahmadis was a strained one from the start (Dannin 2002a, 97–103), and the strains are greater now that recently arrived well-off Pakistanis are in the majority (Walbridge and Haneef 1999).

Issues of racism continue to be crucial to African American Muslims. Many leaders of African American Muslim communities developed anti-white versions of Islam, and Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam is still widely perceived as representing that separatist tradition (Mamiya 1988).⁶ Not only whites but even occasionally "Brother Moslems from the East" were barred from temples (Essien-Udom 1962, 184–85). Malcolm X was the first prominent leader of the Nation of Islam to reject the Nation's separatist or racist teachings after his 1964 pilgrimage to Mecca, after which he also rejected Elijah Muhammad's leadership (Malcolm X and Haley 1965). In the short time before his assassination in 1965, Malcolm turned to pan-Africanism rather than to Islam as a vehicle for black liberation (Curtis 2002a, 88–99). The Middle East would also play an important role in African American cultural politics from the 1950s to the 1970s (McAlister 2001, 84–124).

It was Elijah Muhammad's son, Wallace D. Mohammed, or Warith Deen Mohammed, who aligned the Nation of Islam with mainstream Sunni teachings after his father's death in 1975. He redefined beliefs about the divinity of W. D. Fard and the prophethood of Elijah Muhammad, enjoined his followers to pray five times daily, changed the Ramadan fast from the Christian Advent season to the lunar month of Ramadan, and allowed whites to join the Nation. He renamed the NOI temples masjids, or mosques, took the title of Imam instead of Minister (he has studied Arabic and Islamic law), and disbanded the Fruit of Islam security force. Yet he continued to claim the right to interpret Islam in view of the circumstances in which African Americans lived, focusing on specifically black issues (Curtis 2002a, 108).

W. D. Mohammed still leads the larger part of the former Nation, now renamed the American Society of Muslims. In 1977 Louis Farrakhan split with W. D. Mohammed, reviving and continuing the beliefs and

practices of Elijah Muhammad. Minister Farrakhan's Nation of Islam constitutes a small percentage of African American Muslims, but his public image looms large. Farrakhan has announced that he is joining the Islamic mainstream, although what this means exactly remains to be seen.

Farrakhan and many other African American Muslims focus on America's inner-city black populations, working to establish economic self-sufficiency and eradicate drugs and crime. Major efforts are devoted to converting and supporting African Americans in the prison system. African Americans were 12 percent of the U.S. population in the late 1990s but constituted 41.2 percent of the jail and prison inmate population. American prisons have been a major recruiting ground for Islam (Dannin 2002a, 165–87). Even in 1920 the first Ahmadi missionary, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, was jailed almost upon arrival. Taken into custody allegedly because his religion promoted polygamy, he won a few converts in jail. In 1992 in New York State, Muslims were 17 percent of the state prison population and over 30 percent of the African American prison population; in 2000, 32 percent of the African American prison population was Muslim (Lotfi 2001, 241–42; Dannin 1996b; Dannin 2002a, 166).

In fact, most converts to Islam in the United States are African American and male (Bagby, Perl, and Froehle 2001, 22). Because so many American black men have converted to Islam in prison, a special concern for many African American Muslims has been maintaining civil and religious rights within the prison system. The pioneering efforts of African American Muslims to secure the rights to pray, to receive the services of imams, to eat halal (Islamically slaughtered or prepared) food, and other religious rights in prisons have led to broader claims on American society by other Muslims in other arenas. Long-standing African American efforts to secure legal rights and access to societal resources thus have significantly benefited incoming immigrant Muslims (Moore 1995), yet the indigenous and immigrant communities confront major historical differences as they work together in the United States.

The African American Muslim communities remain quite distinctive (McCloud 1995; Allen 1998; Dannin 2002a). They often hold ambivalent or antagonistic views toward the U.S. government, Christianity, and other racial or ethnic groups, including Muslim immigrants. Because Islam is seen as a defense against racism, as a new and separate collective identity in the United States, many African American Muslims argue that *asabiyya* (group solidarity and experience) must be given priority over the *umma* (the universal Muslim community) at this stage in African American Muslim life. They do not readily accept the customs or authority of immigrant Muslims (McCloud 1995, 4–5, 10–11, conclusion; Turner 1997). African American Muslims—“new Muslims”—are engaged in self-definition and dislike being defined by the “new

Americans" or immigrants (Dannin 1996a, 159, 169). It remains to be seen whether the new but growing group of Hispanic or Latino converts will be equally distinctive.⁷

Arabs and Arab Muslims

The first Muslim immigrants who retained their religion in America came from the Greater Syria region of the declining Ottoman Empire, especially Lebanon, in the late nineteenth century. Part of an Arab immigrant group that was largely Christian in the early decades, their accounts emphasized religious persecution and lack of freedoms under Ottoman rule as well as economic stresses in the Mount Lebanon area. Most immigrants were relatively uneducated men of modest means, from rural areas; they found work in factories and mines and in peddling. Some sent for their families, and others married locally, founding Arabic-speaking communities across North America, with salient concentrations in major urban areas like New York, Chicago, Boston, and Detroit. Most probably viewed themselves as sojourners—temporary or economic migrants who would return home when conditions became more favorable (Abraham and Shryock 2000, 51–53).

But World War I and the restrictive National Origins Quota Act of 1924, which favored the immigration of northwestern Europeans to the United States, effectively separated many early Arab immigrants from their homelands. The First World War and the ending of the Ottoman Empire brought major changes to the homelands. Turkey, shorn of its empire, became a secular state under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who abolished in 1924 the Caliphate in Istanbul, that long-lasting symbol of pan-Islamic political authority. The new League of Nations sanctioned mandates in the Middle East, establishing European powers there. France, which already held North Africa, assumed control of Syria and Lebanon. Britain took over in Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan; it already held Egypt. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 announced the future establishment of a Jewish homeland, Israel, which was duly carved out of predominantly Muslim Palestine in 1948.

In the United States, Christian and Muslim Arabs were initially viewed by outsiders as a single community—as "Turks" and later as "Arabs"—but they viewed themselves as Lebanese or Syrian-Lebanese. Both categorizations emphasized national origin rather than religion. Only after almost one hundred years did a division between Christian and Muslim Arabs become salient in the identity politics and the public, organizational life of the Arab community.

The scholarly literature reflects this shift, focusing first on Arabs and more recently on Muslims, but both labels are used, and sometimes

confusingly. One periodization discusses two major waves of Arab immigration: from 1870 to World War II and from World War II to the present (Suleiman 1999, 1). Yvonne Haddad and Adair Lummis (1987, 13–14) propose a second periodization for all Muslim immigrants; they describe five waves of immigration, the first three of Arabs. In this second scheme, the first wave was from 1875 to 1912 and consisted mostly of uneducated, rural, young Arab men from Lebanon and present-day Syria. The second-wave immigrants, from 1918 to 1922, were mostly the Arab relatives of the first wave, although some urban people came as well. The third wave, from 1930 to 1938, was primarily made up of relatives of all the previous Arab immigrants. Muslims from not only the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East but South Asia, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and other places immigrated in the fourth wave, from 1947 to 1960. Many in this fourth wave were urban elites seeking higher education and better opportunities, and many were refugees. The fifth wave began in 1967 in response to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which reversed the historic preference for European immigrants. That immigration wave extends to the present and has included highly educated professionals as well as skilled and semiskilled workers.

Another periodization proposed for all Muslims sees three waves: two waves of Arabs from the late nineteenth century to World War II and from World War II to 1965, and then a third, post-1965 wave that has expanded to include sixty to one hundred nationalities (Lawrence 1999, 23). These wave breakdowns are based on the immigrants' relationship to religious practices. The first wave established some twenty mosques but was essentially concerned with preserving cultural values (Naff 1985, analyzed in Lawrence 1999, 23). The second wave, including some students and urban entrepreneurs, may have stimulated religious consciousness and mosque-building to some extent, but the third wave, with large numbers of women and children, did this far more. Also, the third wave took place in the midst of major international events: the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, an oil crisis in the Middle East, the fall of the Shah and Ayatollah Khomeini's triumph in Iran. These events increased religious consciousness and pressures toward orthodoxy among both new and old immigrants and also led to foreign sponsorship of activities in the United States (Lawrence 1999, 24–25).

It has been argued that the early Arab category was largely unremarked by the larger society (Naber 2000). Early scholarly writing either followed the "Arab" categorization or focused on the national-origin labels—Lebanese or Syrian-Lebanese—preferred by the people themselves (Abraham and Abraham 1983; Naff 1985). Arabs were treated in contradictory fashion in terms of eligibility for naturalized citizenship

(Samhan 1999; Joseph 1999). People from the Middle East were “white” in successive census racial classifications, but in 1910 the Census Bureau classified them as “Asiatic” by nativity. (Turkey, seat of the Ottoman Empire, was then called Asia Minor.) Arabs were twice denied citizenship and declared not to be “free white persons,” in 1909 and 1914 (the latter case involved a “Syrian of Asiatic birth”), although both decisions were reversed on appeal. The second reversal on appeal came in 1923; ironically, this was the same year in which Asian Indians (including Muslims), previously deemed eligible as Caucasians, were declared “not white in the popular meaning of the term” and therefore ineligible for U.S. citizenship.

Large Arab American communities developed in Michigan as Arabic-speaking immigrants and refugees from many different places settled there. The ways in which Lebanese, Palestinian, Yemeni, Iraqi, and other Arabs are simultaneously “on the margins” and “in the mainstream” have been captured by Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock in a comprehensive volume, *Arab Detroit* (2000, 27) (see especially Shryock 2000). The book is notable for its inclusion of poems and memoirs and its emphasis on “themes of imagination, transcendence, and personal growth.” The volume shows Old World identities becoming “Arab American” ones as village politics gives way to multi-ethnic coalition politics, living in ethnic neighborhoods is superseded by living anywhere, protective families become open families, religious conservatism turns into religious liberalism, and speaking mostly Arabic changes to speaking mostly English (Abraham and Shryock 2000, 22). Abraham (2000) traces changes over the decades in mosque discourses and practices, from “isolationist” discourses and practices to “integrationist” or “American” ones, and sometimes back again. An interview with an immigrant husband and American-born wife (both of Lebanese ancestry) also points to the tensions between the two trends (Howell 2000a).

Interestingly, Shi’a from Lebanon and Iraq, minorities in the Arab world, are majorities in Arab Detroit. Liyakat Takim (2002) states that the Shi’a participated jointly with Sunnis in Detroit until the late 1930s, then established their own clubs; they finally established mosques in the 1960s. Abdo Elkholy (1966) also speaks of social clubs rather than mosques in his description of the scene in 1959.⁸ Linda Walbridge (1997, 18–19 *passim*) describes the Shi’a in Dearborn at the end of the twentieth century, delineating class and national-origin differences that place the Lebanese economically above Palestinians and Yemenis. The newest arrivals, desperately poor Shi’a refugees from Iraq after 1991, are embarking on the path traveled by earlier groups (but with variations; see Walbridge and Aziz 2000).

A national-level Arab American identity began to develop after Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 (Elkholy 1966) and emerged strongly in the 1960s in reaction to the humiliating defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG) was founded that same year, and the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) followed in 1972. Both the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), founded in 1980, and the Arab American Institute (AAI), founded in 1985, undertook political and legal work supporting Arab Americans. The AAUG, after a long decline, ended in 2001, and the NAAA was merged into the ADC in the late 1990s. The ADC and the AAI now represent Arab Americans; Arab and Muslim cultural, religious, and political interactions with the American legal system continue to command special attention (Al-Hayani 1999; Moore 2002b).

A specifically Muslim identity, expressed in national organizations that transcended local mosques and communities of national origin, began to develop among Arabic-speaking Americans in the 1950s and 1960s (see appendix 2). This move was led by the earlier Lebanese immigrants and by newly arrived Muslim foreign students. The Federation of Islamic Associations (FIA) was formed by Lebanese immigrants in 1953, and the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) was formed by Muslim foreign students in American universities in 1963 (Haddad and Lummis 1987, 5; Muhammad 1984, 211). The FIA included Muslim associations in Canada as well as in the United States, and this broader North American base was adopted by the MSA as its student leaders graduated and formed the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). The FIA, MSA, and ISNA were initially led by Muslims from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. Certain Arab American leaders were organizing as members of a specifically Muslim community by the 1980s, when Muslims had become the majority among Arab immigrants and many more Muslims had immigrated to the United States from around the world.

South Asian Muslims

Immigrants from British India, mostly peasants from the Punjab, began to arrive in the United States around 1900, but Asian immigration was stopped by federal legislation during and after World War I (the Barred Zone Act of 1917 and the National Origins Quota Act of 1924). The few Punjabi Muslims who came married primarily Mexican American women, as did their Sikh companions (Leonard 1992). In India, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru mobilized the people against colonial rule, but as Britain prepared to grant independence in the 1940s, the nationalist movement split along religious lines. Citing Muslim fears

about living in a Hindu-majority India, Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim League demanded a separate Muslim state consisting of Muslim-majority areas. Britain made this concession, granting independence to not one but two states, India and Pakistan, in 1947. Pakistan's western and eastern provinces were separated by one thousand miles of India, and although many Muslims migrated to Pakistan, India still had a very large Muslim minority (some 12 percent). Traumatic violence occurred along both frontiers between Pakistan and India at the time of partition, and the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir acceded to India, an outcome still contested by Pakistan.

In 1946, just one year before Indian and Pakistani independence, the United States enacted the Luce-Celler Act; extending citizenship through naturalization to Indians, this legislation was still limited by the quota system set in place in 1924 and so produced few new immigrants. Large numbers of Indian and Pakistani immigrants began arriving only after the major changes in U.S. immigration policy in 1965. Immigration statistics and the census show a sharp rise in the number immigrating from India and Pakistan in the late 1960s, from Bangladesh after 1970–1971 (when it split off from Pakistan), and from Afghanistan after the Soviets invaded it in 1979 (Leonard 1997, 171–73).

Despite the large numbers of incoming South Asian Muslims, scholarly studies of Muslims in the 1970s and 1980s still focused on Arabic-speaking Muslims based on the East Coast and in the Midwest. However, scholars who were documenting considerable adaptation on the part of the earlier Arab Muslims noticed a new group of highly educated Pakistanis in upstate New York. These immigrants stood out as the most "conservative" Muslims in beliefs and practices (Haddad and Lummis 1987, 30–33, 123–24, 127), and the shift in sources and numbers of Muslim immigrants seemed to signal an interruption in a pattern of Muslim "assimilation," or accommodation, to American society (see also Abraham and Abraham 1983, 1–3).

South Asian Muslims are no longer overlooked. They are probably the largest single group among American immigrant Muslims; almost all of the immigrants to the United States from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, and perhaps 12 percent of those coming from India, are Muslim. (India's population is about 12 percent Muslim.) These immigrants can be seen as separate national-origin communities, given the political conflicts among them, but they constitute a single diasporic population in many ways. The United States is an important site of reconnection between these South Asians. They share memories of British colonialism, the partition, the birth of Bangladesh, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. These historical events may be remembered and interpreted differently by the immigrants, and the ease of transnational

travel and communication gives them little chance to forget divisive homeland politics, yet they do often come together, particularly in Muslim American religious and political arenas.

Another unifying factor is that the South Asian Muslims, like the new South Asian immigrants generally, are relatively homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic class. In the U.S. census, the immigrants from India (others do not have a separate census classification) indicate the characteristics of the broader group. (Eighty percent of American South Asians are from India and Pakistan, the former outnumbering the latter by about ten to one.) In 1990 Indian immigrants had the highest median household income, family income, and per capita income of any foreign-born group, and they also had the highest percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher and the highest percentage in managerial and professional fields (Leonard 1997, 77–78). Although appropriate nationwide statistics are not readily available, a careful study of southern California ethnic groups shows that Indians and Pakistanis are ahead of "Arabs" with respect to education, occupational level, and household income (Allen and Turner 1997, 57, 71, 135, 136).

Not surprisingly, these post-1965 Indian and Pakistani Muslim immigrants are conspicuous and powerful in American Muslim religious and political arenas. Most of them have been educated in the English language since childhood, and Muslim Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Afghans often have strong religious orientations.⁹ Indian Muslims are accustomed to being a minority in a secular democracy, and to varying degrees, all South Asians come to the United States with experience in democratic politics, particularly student politics. In contrast, Muslims from most Middle Eastern countries have had little experience with democratic processes.

South Asians, like Arabs, have defied easy racial classification, and their placement has changed over time. Despite the setback in 1923 (when the U.S. Supreme Court classified them as nonwhite and ineligible for citizenship, a ruling that would not be reversed until passage of the Luce-Celler Act of 1946), South Asians in the United States today are often perceived as white (unlike South Asians in the United Kingdom and Canada). There is disagreement about this, and many South Asians either claim nonwhite status or feel that others perceive them as nonwhite, yet it is undeniable that some are often treated or classified as white. One indication is that Asian Indians are the least residentially clustered (that is, the least segregated from whites) in several studies (for example, Allen and Turner 1997, 231). Another indication of South Asians' white status was the controversy that arose among Indians when Indian businessmen claimed minority status for preferential purposes (Fornaro 1984, 28–32). Perhaps, as has been argued for American Jews, the persistence of racism

in the United States and the presence of African Americans contribute to classifications of many South Asians as white (Boyarin and Boyarin 1997, xi).

South Asian immigrants are also frequently classified as “Asian American,” an increasingly important pan-ethnic category in the United States. Asian Americans, commonly misperceived as a “model minority,” are a rapidly rising proportion of the U.S. total population (they will become 8 percent by 2020), and Asian Indians are the third-largest Asian American group, after Chinese and Filipinos (Leonard 1997, 68–69). South Asians themselves, including Muslims, are often ambivalent about their self-placement or placement by others in this category, and the category sometimes expands to include West Asian and Middle Eastern Muslims—but more often it does not (but see Lawrence 2002, who argues for the expansion).

I turn now to the late-twentieth-century efforts by Muslim religious and political leaders to bring these diverse communities and histories closer together.