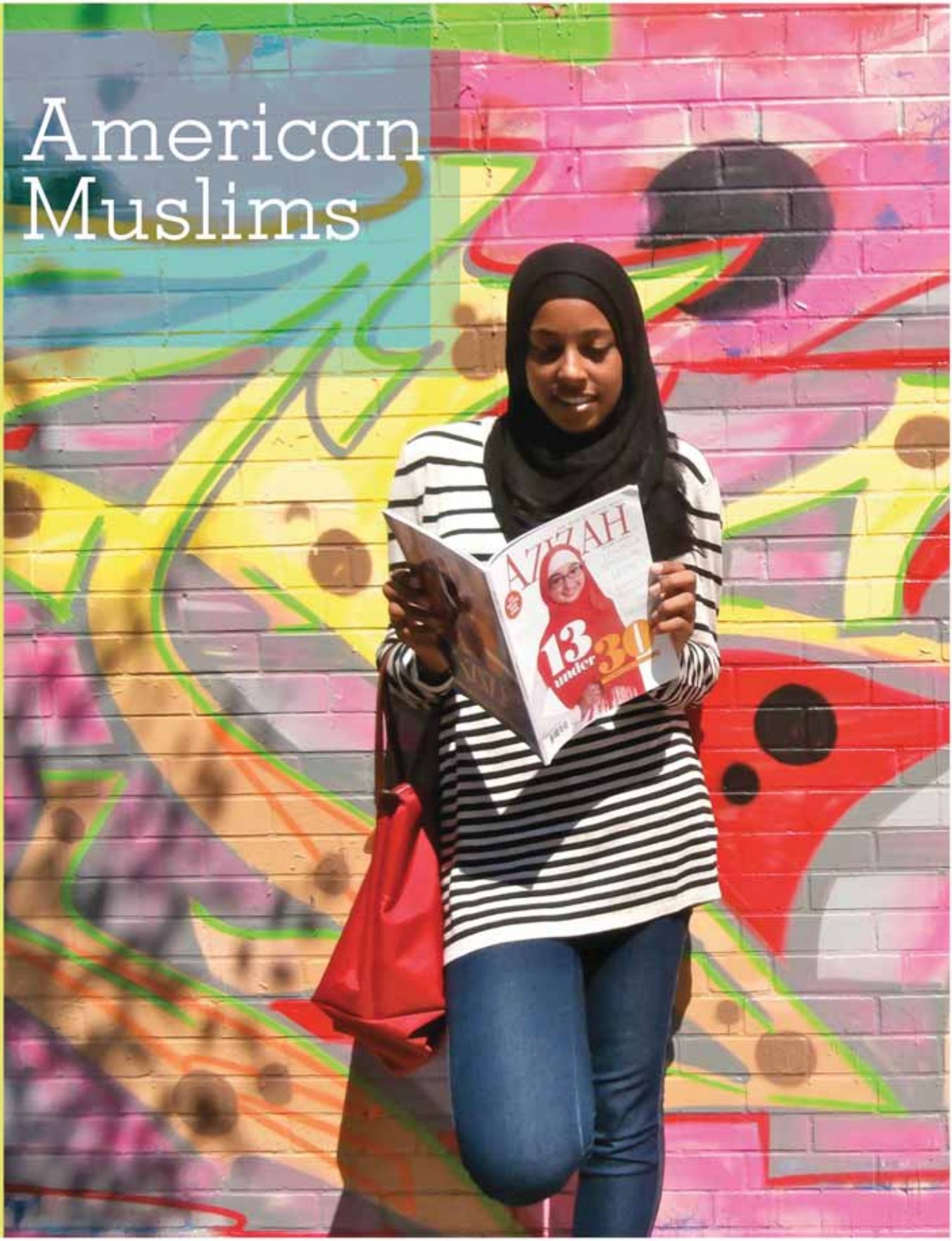
American Muslims



American Muslims live in cities, towns and rural areas across the United States. Where do they live?

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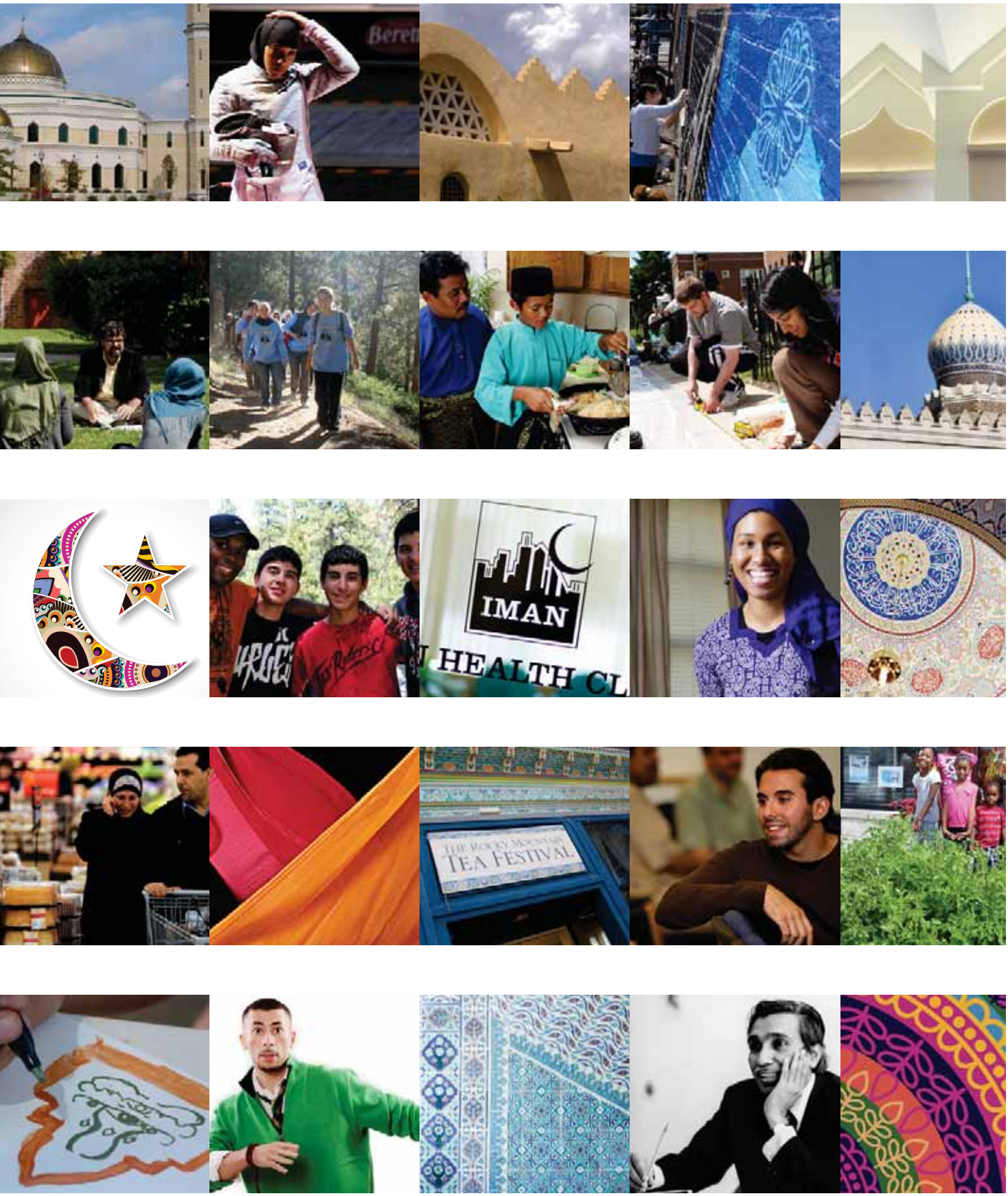
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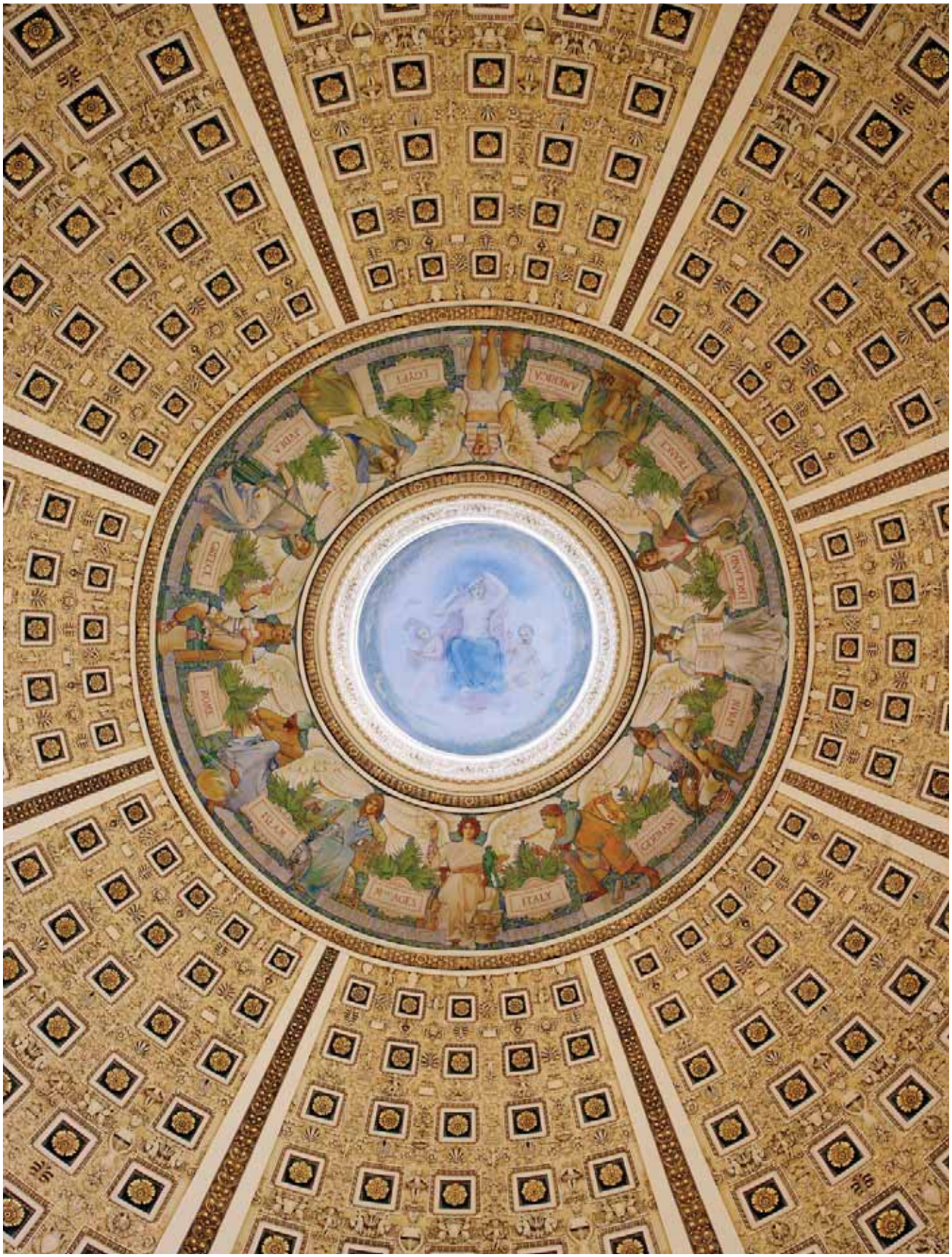
Who are American Muslims?


ASIA
AMERICA
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ROME
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SERBIA
GERMANY
HUNGARY
ITALY

A few years ago I was doing research in the main reading room of the Library of Congress in Washington, when I took a short break to stretch my neck. As I stared up at the ornately painted dome 160 feet above me, the muscles in my neck loosened—and my eyes widened in surprise at what they saw.

by
Samier Mansur

Left, the dome of the Library of Congress reading room in Washington, D.C., depicts important influences on civilization, including Islam. Preceding page, a Muslim teenager gets ready to play soccer in Dallas, Texas.

Painted on the library's central dome were 12 winged men and women representing the epochs and influences that contributed to the advancement of civilization. Seated among these luminaries of history was a bronze-toned figure, depicted with a scientific instrument in a pose of deep thought. Next to him a plaque heralded the influence he represented: Islam.

The fact that the world's largest library, just steps from the U.S. Capitol, pays homage to the intellectual achievements of Muslims—alongside those of other groups—affirms a central tenet of American identity: The United States is not only a nation born of diversity, but one that thrives because of diversity. And this is not by accident, but by design.

The country's founders recognized that the fragile alliance of states that made up the early United States would survive only if it could unify its diverse, competing—and at times, conflicting—religious and ethnic groups into the fold of a new, collective national identity. Without creative and inclusive solutions, the fragile nation could easily crumble in the face of sectarian divisions. The creative solution the founders devised was a Constitution that placed above all else the individual's right to freedom of religious worship and thought. It was only fitting that a land founded upon the promise of freedom would begin first with freedom inside the heart and mind of the individual.

Above, the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Michigan. Opposite, clockwise from top righ, students outside the South Asia Youth Action building, Queens, New York. A woman at her fabric shop, Brooklyn, New York. A health fair sponsored by the Detroit Muslim Center. An Arabic class at California's Zaytuna College. Guests at a White House iftar.

Almost 250 years ago this was a revolutionary concept—a risky endeavor that had no modern precedent. But in retrospect, it is not surprising that the Constitution's legal guarantee of freedom of thought and worship would give rise to a religiously diverse and vibrant society. And while the stories of how disparate peoples became Americans are not always free of conflict and tragedy, the ongoing narrative of America is the continuous unfolding of unity through diversity.

The story of the United States began with the story of religious freedom. It is a story that continues to shape the nation today.

Thanks to its fundamental openness, the United States today is among the most culturally and religiously diverse countries in the world—so much so that, within 30 years, its minority populations will outnumber the majority. Without fear of encountering institutionalized discrimination, American citizens are free to practice their religion, give voice to their views and use their creative energies to pursue their personal aspirations. The result is a dynamic marketplace of ideas where all have the right to express themselves, as long as they are respectful of the rights of others.

Keith Ellison,

U.S. Congressman, center, confers with colleagues at the U.S. Capitol, above left.

Like most aspects of American life, religious worship in the United States is infused with the spirit of inclusion and mutual respect. During the month of Ramadan, for example, mosques routinely open their doors to neighbors of other faiths to partake in the breaking of the fast at sundown. A couple of years ago, I had the pleasure of attending an iftar dinner at one of the oldest Jewish synagogues in Washington. The dinner was attended by religious leaders and practitioners from all the major faith traditions. Scenes like these have become common across the United States, as communities come together to share and celebrate the diverse and collective experience of what it means to be American.

Muslims in the United States contribute to the social and economic fabric of their communities. They are among the most educated and highest-income-earning groups in the country, and they participate at every level of society—from teachers, doctors, lawyers and engineers, to elected officials at the highest levels of government. In fact, the very same day that I gazed upon the dome of the Library of Congress, I discovered another treasure housed in the great library. When the first American Muslim congressman, Keith Ellison, took the oath of office in 2007, he used a Quran that had belonged to Thomas Jefferson. This Quran, hand-marked with the initials "TJ," is displayed in the library, next to Jefferson's copy of the Old Testament.

Above, Congressman Keith Ellison took his oath of office using a Quran once owned by Thomas Jefferson. Opposite, Muslims attend services on *Eid-al-Adha* at the Muslim Community Center in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The story of the United States began with the story of religious freedom. From the halls of government to the archives of history, it is a story that has reaffirmed itself time and again. It is a story that continues to shape the nation today.

In a world where many countries must come to terms with increasing diversity brought about by the triple forces of globalization, technology and travel, there is a lesson in the experience of the United States and the forging of American identity. It is a lesson that is embodied in the Latin words inscribed on the seal of the United States, and sums up the central theme of the American identity—

"E Pluribus Unum": out of many, one.

THE

KORAN,

COMMONLY CALLED

The Alcoran of MOHAMMED,

Tranſlated into ENGLISH immediately from the Original ARABIC;

WITH

EXPLANATORY NOTES,

TAKEN FROM THE MOST

APPROVED COMMENTATORS.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A Preliminary Diſcourſe.

VOL. I.

By GEORGE SALE, Gent.

The founders of the United States were familiar with Islam and cultivated strong relationships with the leaders of Muslim countries from the beginning of the republic. Some of the earliest treaties signed between the United States and foreign powers were with Muslim countries, including Morocco, Ottoman Tripolitania and Tunis.

Left, the inside title page of the 1765 edition of the Quran owned by third U.S. President Thomas Jefferson.

Freedom of religion is one of the cornerstones of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, which define citizens' rights and the organization of government in the United States.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison were adamant about religious freedom and wanted to encourage a thriving, inclusive democracy. One clause in the Constitution supports this end, stating: "No religious Test shall ever be required for Qualification" for public office. Yet delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention worried that this was not enough to prevent state-supported religion.

The newly formed Congress passed the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, called the Bill of Rights, to provide clarity on certain issues. Religious freedom was addressed in the First Amendment with these words: "Congress shall make

Freedom of religion in the U.S. was addressed in the Bill of Rights and ratified by each house of Congress in September 1789.

Above, Abdul Rahman Sori was emancipated with the help of the sixth U.S. president, John Quincy Adams.

no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Madison, who steered this amendment through Congress, introduced the Bill of Rights on June 8, 1789, indicating his opposition to a state religion. He said, "[T]he civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext infringed."

Most Americans agreed—the Bill of Rights was ratified by the necessary two-thirds of each house of Congress in September 1789, and by three-quarters of the states by December 1791.

The First Amendment ensures the separation of church and state, a phrase coined by Thomas Jefferson in an 1802 letter to a religious minority in Connecticut, the Danbury Baptists: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his god, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and state." His interpretation and language have survived tests of time and many Supreme Court deliberations.

Early Ties with Muslim Countries

In 1777, even before George Washington's inauguration as president, Morocco recognized the United States as an independent country, and in 1786 signed one of the earliest treaties with the United States. The relationship with Morocco has prospered for more than 225 years.

In a letter to the envoy of the Sultan of Morocco finalizing the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and Morocco, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson used the *hijri* dating of the Islamic calendar where they could have used the Gregorian date. They closed their letter with the words: "May the providence of the one Almighty God, whose kingdom is the only existing one, protect your Excellency."

In 1777

Morocco was the first country to recognize the United States as an independent country, and was among the first countries to sign a treaty with the United States.

As president, John Adams signed a treaty with the Bey of Tunis, in 1797, which states that "no pretext, arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries."

Mutual Respect and Problem Solving

Successive U.S. presidents maintained strong ties with the Muslim world. John Quincy Adams, throughout his career as a senator, as sixth U.S. president and as a congressman after his presidency, championed the rights of slaves, including African Muslims. He helped emancipate Moroccan Abdul Rahman Ibrahim Ibn Sori and received him in the White House, events Adams noted in his diary. Adams successfully defended the West African captives, whom scholars believe included Muslims, who mutinied aboard the slave ship *La Amistad* off the coast of Long Island, New York, in the court case *United States v. Libellants and Claimants of the Schooner Amistad*.

The friendship President Millard Fillmore showed to the Ottoman Empire prompted the sultan to contribute a commemorative marble block to the Washington Monument inscribed: "To aid in the perpetuation of the friendship existing between the two countries, Abdul Medjid Khan's name is written on the Monument of Washington." The tribute may be seen at the 197-foot level inside the monument.

An anti-slavery letter written by Tunisian Major General Heussein and forwarded to Secretary of State William H. Seward by the American consul at Tunis so impressed President Abraham Lincoln that he had it reprinted in its entirety and widely disseminated. Heussein described the abolition of slavery in Tunisia

Above, John Adams, as ambassador and second U.S. president, signed treaties with Morocco and other Muslim countries.

"America and Islam are not exclusive...they overlap and share common principles... Let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America."

2009
President Barack Obama, Cairo, Egypt

and the guidance of the Quran on the issue. The letter, discussed widely in the American press, was lauded by American abolitionists. Slavery in the United States was abolished in 1865.

Courtesies and hospitality were exchanged between presidents and Muslim leaders into the 20th century, as the scope of engagement increased. President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave the first known speech by a U.S. president at an American mosque when the exquisitely designed Islamic Center of Washington was dedicated in 1957. He and his wife removed their shoes for the event, making headlines in the *New York Times*. At its dedication Eisenhower said the new mosque was welcome, adding, "America would fight with her whole strength for your right to have here your own church and worship according to your own conscience."

1957
Eisenhower gave the first known speech by a U.S. president at an American mosque.

President Barack Obama has underscored the importance of U.S. relations with the Muslim world in speeches at home and abroad. In Cairo in 2009, he said, "America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap and share common principles." He added, "Let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America."

1969

President Richard Nixon invited Dr. Ali H. Abdul Kander, director of the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C., to his inauguration. Nixon later presented a glass mosque lamp to the center as a token of friendship and respect.

1974

In 1974, Gerald Ford was the first U.S. president to send an Eid al-Fitr message to all Americans of the Islamic faith, noting that "for nearly 200 years, our nation has derived its strength from the diversity of its people and of their beliefs. That strength has been greatly enhanced by your own religious heritage." An annual Eid al-Fitr message has remained a practice of most presidents since.

1980

President Jimmy Carter repeatedly spoke of American respect for the Muslim world. At a 1980 meeting with Islamic scholars he said that "the United States has no quarrel with the peoples of Islam, has long-standing ties with Islam, and has great respect for the principles of that faith."

1981

President Ronald Reagan appointed the first Muslim ambassador, Robert Dickson Crane, to the United Arab Emirates and named Shirin Tahir-Kheli to the National Security Council. Tahir-Kheli also served under Presidents George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush. Both Bushes acknowledged the values of Islam as compatible with American values.

1993

President Bill Clinton invited African-American Muslim leader W.D. Mohammed to speak at both of his interfaith inaugural prayer services, in 1993 and 1997. Clinton appointed Muslims to important government offices and hosted the first White House Eid celebration.

2009

President Barack Obama announced "A New Beginning" with the Muslim world in a speech at Cairo University in June 2009.

2013

The U.S. commemorative Eid stamp. The first was issued in 2001.

Opposite, left to right, President Bill and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visit the Central Mosque in Dakar, Senegal, in 1998. President Barack Obama addresses students at Cairo University, 2009. President Dwight Eisenhower speaks at the Islamic Center of Washington dedication in 1957.

"I came to Chicago in 1912 with my brother. At that time we already had an uncle and a cousin here. They got us a furnished room on 18th Street and the very next day after our arrival, we started to work....We carried a suitcase in which there was linen tablecloths, napkins, small rugs, handkerchiefs and stuff like that."

Above, an early Muslim immigrant's account from Alixa Naff's book *Becoming American*.

Left, immigrants ride a ferry to the immigration station on Ellis Island, New York, 1920.

Muslim immigration to the United States began in the late 19th century, from regions under Ottoman Empire rule including today's Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, Syria and Turkey. Most immigrants settled in large urban centers like New York City, Chicago and Detroit. According to scholar Alixa Naff, they often became peddlers, an occupation that took them to North Dakota, South Dakota and rural parts of Iowa, Michigan and Illinois.

In her book *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*, Naff cites a 1967 newspaper account of Muslims from Damascus who settled near Crookston, Minnesota, around 1902:

> "At first these pioneer Moslems peddled their wares on foot throughout North Dakota, but used horse and buggy when they could afford it. Some of the more successful bargainers were even able to purchase automobiles."

c.1912

Above, newly arrived immigrants pose on Ellis Island, c. 1910. Opposite, clockwise from top left, Christians and Muslims pose together in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1926. Immigrants arrive at Angel Island Immigration Station in California, c. 1925. A peddler sells to North Dakota homesteaders, c. 1910.

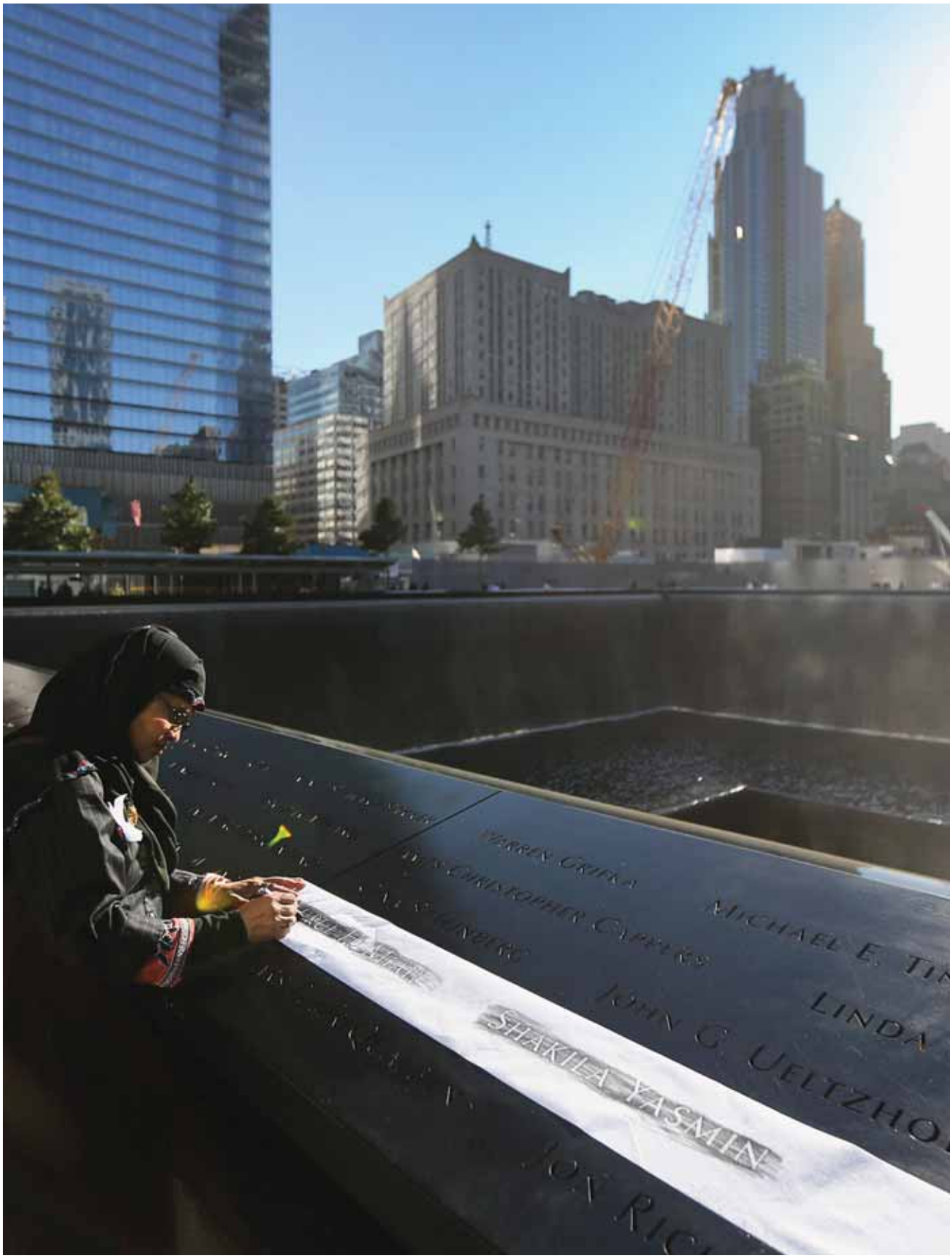
They liked North Dakota and, Naff writes, "clustered in three localities—the Stanley-Ross area, Rolla-Dunseith, and Glenfield-Binford…And when they had saved and borrowed enough money and had learned the rudiments of the language, they became homesteaders or operated small stores." Ross, North Dakota, was the site of the earliest known U.S. mosque, built in 1929.

Naff quotes an early Muslim immigrant to the Chicago area: "I came to Chicago in 1912 with my brother. At that time we already had an uncle and a cousin here. They got us a furnished room on 18th Street and the very next day after our arrival, we started to work. In those days the Arabs had a couple of wholesale dry goods stores on 18th Street where us peddlers used to get our stock. We carried a suitcase in which there was linen tablecloths, napkins, small rugs, handkerchiefs and stuff like that."

Meanwhile, on North America's Pacific Coast, South Asian immigrants began coming to the United States via Canada or the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco. Called "Hindus," they were, in fact, mostly Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims from India. The latter made up about 10 to 12 percent of the early immigrants, according to scholar Karen Isaksen Leonard, who has written extensively about South Asian Americans. Young men seeking their fortunes worked on farms, in railway construction or in lumber mills throughout the West until they could buy or lease land. Those few who could afford it attended universities, favoring the University of California at Berkeley.

Once laws restricting immigration from Asia to the United States were repealed in 1965, opening the door again to migrants from predominantly Muslim countries, many more Muslims immigrated. Immigration laws were further relaxed to allow family members to join relatives already in the United States. Other laws encouraged skilled individuals to migrate. Enough took the opportunity to become Americans that today American Muslims are found all over the United States, in every kind of occupation.

1929 Ross, North Dakota: the earliest known U.S. mosque.


SHAKILA YASMIN
JOHN G. UELTZHO
LINDA
MICHAEL E. TI

My family and I moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in September 2001, one day after the horrific attacks of 9/11. Like the rest of the nation, we were horrified and outraged by the loss of innocent life. We were also scared, not knowing how we, as Muslims, would be perceived and treated by our new neighbors.

by
Dalia Mogahed

Left, at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York City, Khudeza Begum traces the name of her nephew, Nural Miah, who was killed with his wife, Shakila Yasmin.

Many American Muslims were afraid of reprisal violence against our community. That week, several Muslim community leaders warned that Friday prayer services could be targets for violence, and even suggested that people not attend.

My husband and I decided to put our faith above our fear and go to Friday prayer in our new city.

Instead of encountering hostility from the wider community, we found that half of the people at the mosque that day were Americans of other faiths who had come to express support and solidarity.

This story is a testimony to the courage and compassion of ordinary Americans who chose pluralism over prejudice.

Muslim American doctors volunteered their time in free medical clinics for the uninsured. Young American Muslims fed the homeless and helped rebuild homes. Others cleaned highways and parks.

Many of them were encouraged to attend our mosque by their own faith leaders who had worked with the Muslim community for years. Women of other faiths offered to accompany Muslim women when they went out in case anyone would harass them because of their *hijab*.

Above, left to right, Christians and Muslims at an interfaith vigil in Dearborn, Michigan. The Islamic Center of Washington. A Malaysian family prepares an Eid al-Fitr meal in Los Angeles. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Washington hosts an annual blood drive.

This example of inter-religious cooperation at a time of tragedy was also the product of the American Muslim efforts all over the country, in their openness toward people of other faiths and in their contribution to the betterment of society as a whole.

This relative comfort with diversity isn't hard for Muslim Americans. America is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, and Muslim Americans are the most ethnically diverse faith community in America. I remember an Egyptian friend visited me during Eid and at the prayer commented that she had only seen this much diversity in Mecca.

While no single racial group makes up the majority among U.S. Muslims, the largest group isn't Arab Americans or Muslims from the Subcontinent, but instead African Americans. Many African-American Muslims came to Islam as adults, but many more have Muslim parents and even grandparents. Some are descendants of Muslim Africans who were brought to America centuries ago as slaves.

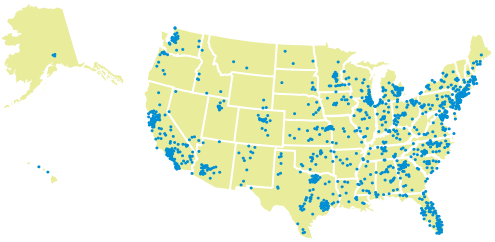
Today American Muslims are among the most educated, entrepreneurial and hardworking faith communities in the U.S. They are more likely than the average American to have an advanced degree and to be a business owner. American Muslims are on average younger than any other faith group, with an average age of just 35 years old as compared to 54 or older in other communities. This means that they are more likely to be employed and contributing to the growth of America's economy as workers and job creators. Muslim Americans are doctors and engineers, but also lawyers, teachers, police officers, moviemakers and elected officials.

American Muslims don't just help build their country through their professions. They volunteer their time and donate their money to help America's needy. I witnessed this firsthand when I served on President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in 2009.

When the president called the nation to community service, Muslim Americans answered the call with enthusiasm. The goal of the "Muslim Serve" campaign was 1,000 days of service in the summer of 2009, with at least 25 percent of the projects done in cooperation with other faith communities. This message of serving God by serving others was heard in Friday sermons and on Facebook, in crowded conferences and intimate conversations. Muslim American doctors volunteered their time in free medical clinics for the uninsured.

Muslim Americans are the most ethnically diverse faith community in America.

Above, high school students chat at Bluestockings Bookstore, New York City.



American Muslims live throughout the United States, from Alaska to Hawaii, from East Coast to West.

2,100 Muslim congregations and 2.6 million adherents were reported in 592 counties in the United States.

Source: 2010 U.S. Religious Congregations and Membership Study

Young American Muslims fed the homeless and helped rebuild homes. Others cleaned highways and parks, while Muslim American charities provided books to underfunded schools on Native American reservations. The result of that summer's campaign was more than 3,000 days of Muslim-led service work, over 90 percent in cooperation with another religious community. I personally gave the report documenting these accomplishments to President Obama, who recognized the community for their contribution to our country during his speech at the White House iftar, a yearly tradition.

From Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to the devastating 2013 tornado in Oklahoma, Muslim Americans have donated tens of millions of dollars in disaster relief and thousands of volunteer hours to provide needed supplies and to rebuild homes and businesses.

Most U.S. Muslims also say they identify strongly with both their country and their faith, and like other Americans, see no contradiction between these identities.

Above, a young volunteer distributes water at a Special Olympics event, Miami Beach, Florida. Opposite, left to right, boys read a flyer at the Islamic Foundation Mosque in Villa Park, Illinois. Volunteers serve the homeless in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Does this mean U.S. Muslims face no challenges as a community in America? Of course not. Like many other communities, Muslims sometimes face prejudice and discrimination.

American Muslims are cooperating with fellow Americans of conscience to combat misconceptions through dialogue and interfaith service. Efforts to educate the public also include engaging journalists, as well as those who make movies and television programs. Programs are also tailored to law enforcement officers, educators and policymakers.

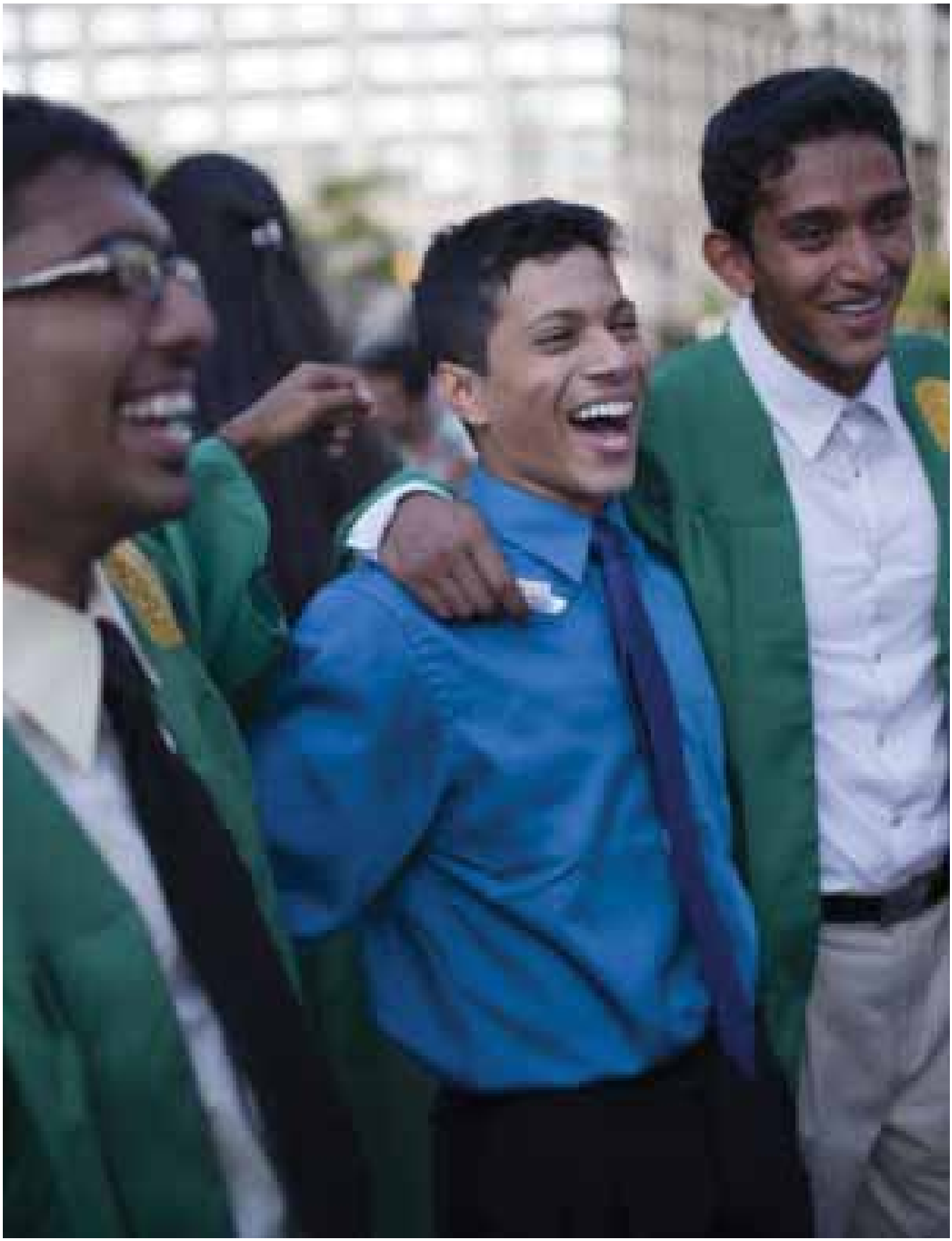
When American Muslims work to improve their country by helping it grow to include all its members, they are strengthening a time-tested American tradition, a custom of choosing progress over prejudice. It was this tradition that freed the slaves and that gave women and ethnic minorities the right to vote. It was this tradition that civil rights leaders tapped into to bring America closer to living its promise. It was this tradition that so many ethnic groups called on to gain acceptance in America's mainstream.

Virtually every immigrant group, whether Italians, Poles, Jews, Chinese, Japanese or Latinos, faced challenges at first. Catholics once suffered discrimination and suspicions of dual loyalty, but then John F. Kennedy, a Catholic Irish-American, became U.S. president. The interracial marriage that produced Barack Obama was illegal in many states, including Virginia, when he was born. He went on to become U.S. president, partially because he was the first Democrat to win Virginia in decades. This process of growth and renewal continues today.

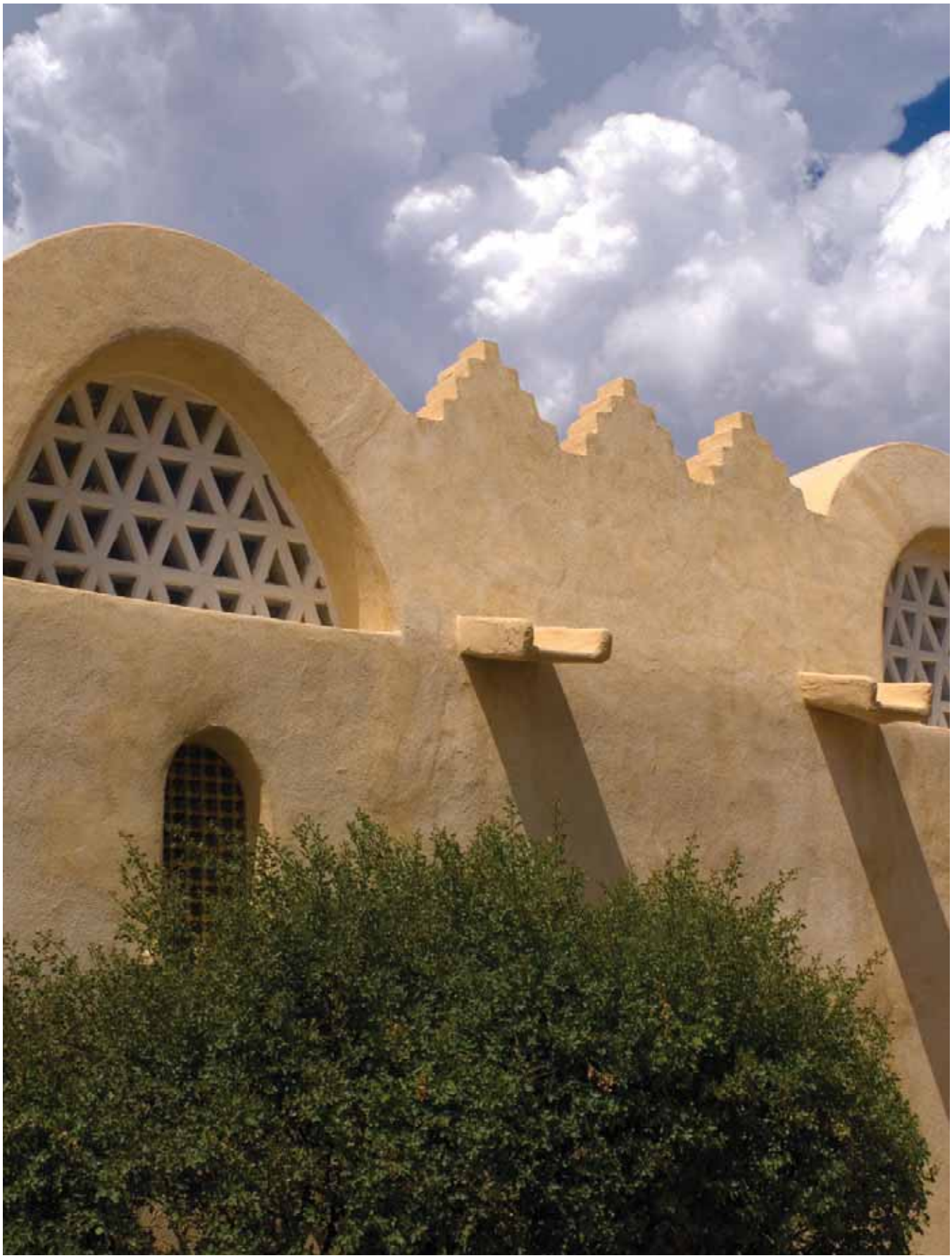
35 years = average age of U.S. Muslims

Like other Americans, U.S. Muslims welcome some of their government's policies and disagree with others, domestically and internationally. And like other Americans, Muslim Americans express their approval and dissent by writing opinion editorials in newspapers, appearing in news programs and speaking publically in universities and think tanks. They join organizations that work for change, and start new ones.

Despite some challenges, Muslim Americans largely believe in America's promise of justice and equality. Most say they trust the fairness of elections and have confidence in the judicial system. Most U.S. Muslims also say they identify strongly with both their country and their faith, and like other Americans, see no contradiction between these identities.



Where are American Muslims?



One day, Nasraddin Hodja's neighbors see him throwing spoonfuls of yogurt into a lake. They ask him, "What are you doing Hodja?" The old man answers, "Just throwing some yogurt into the lake to start a new culture." "What good will that do?" the neighbors say. "It seems like you are simply wasting good yogurt!"

A more hostile neighbor shouts, "It's *haram* to waste food!" Nasraddin Hodja isn't fazed by being called a sinner, and declares, "My intention is to turn the entire lake into yogurt." The neighbors say, "But it is only out of milk that one can make yogurt. Besides, look at the size of the lake!" "I know, I know," Nasraddin Hodja answers. "But just suppose it works!"

Turkish fable

by
Cihan Kaan

Left, the Dar Al-Islam Mosque and madrassa in Abiquiu, New Mexico, designed by Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, evokes traditional American Southwest architecture. Educating Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam is a goal of Dar Al-Islam. Preceding page: Classmates graduating from Bronx High School of Science.

In this story, the Turkish folk hero Nasraddin Hodja is positive, inclusive and open to the unexpected, qualities that are valued as much in the United States as they were in Hodja's society. Like all immigrants from different cultures, American Muslims contribute a bit of culture to the "lake."

Today this lake, literally, could be one of the Great Lakes near Dearborn, Michigan, where many Muslims put down deep roots a century ago. It could be the waters of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, near one of the oldest Sufi communities in

Hakeem Olajuwon
basketball player and coach

Dr. Mehmet Oz
surgeon and tv host

Ariana Delawari
multi-media artist

Kareem Salama
country music singer

Dean Obeidallah
comedian and producer

Negin Farsad
comedian, filmmaker, writer

Cold Crush Brothers
hip-hop artists

Above, left to right, Kareem Salama is a country, pop and rock musician. Dr. Mehmet Oz, a New York heart surgeon, hosts a nationally broadcast TV show. Screenwriter and producer Khadijah Rashid founded Muslimah Movies to tell American Muslim stories.

North America, or any place where Muslims are enriching American society through their engagement, participation and desire to contribute to the country that offers them a chance to pursue their dreams.

Muslims in the United States are not homogeneous. They are ethnically diverse people who are equally diverse in talent, experience—and religious traditions.

The sportsmanship of African-American boxer Muhammad Ali and the medical advice of Turkish-American cardiovascular surgeon and television show host Dr. Mehmet Oz are emblematic of what other American Muslims contribute to the country every day. In the deserts of Arizona, Sufi healers serve American Indians living on reservations. In comedy clubs, Iranian American Maz Jobrani and Palestinian-Italian-American lawyer-turned-comedian Dean Obeidallah provoke laughter while raising points about ethnicity, religion and culture.

American Muslims espouse different threads of Islam, including mainstream Sunni and Shi'a, Ahmadiyya and Sufism. While not considered orthodox Islam, the latter two follow many tenets of Islam.

The best examples of such threads in action are seen in community interfaith outreach programs across the country. Discussions between religious and community leaders and collaborations among artists and thinkers of all faiths foster mutual understanding and forge unity that is the heart of the American way.

In one such initiative the Interfaith Church of New York brought together faith leaders and major cultural contributors for a cross-community discussion and celebration a few years ago. Attendees

included Muslim leaders such as early hip-hop artists the As-Salaam Brothers (later the Cold Crush Brothers); Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf of the multi-faith Cordoba Initiative and several local imams. Innovative filmmakers and teachers were there. These are creative contributors to American culture who may not wear their Islam on their sleeves, but who remain observant Muslims. Business magnate and co-founder of the hip-hop Def Jam music label Russell Simmons was also there to lend his support. When there is openness on all sides, I have seen such interactions create new understanding, respect and mutual benefit.

Muslims are breaking new ground in the arts. One example is Negin Farsad, an irreverent comedian, filmmaker and one of the stars of the film *The Muslims Are Coming*.

Above, left to right, comedians Maysoon Zayid, left, and Dean Obeidallah co-founded the Arab-American Comedy Festival. Afghan-American singer and multi-media artist Ariana Delawari performs around the world. Hip-hop entrepreneur Russell Simmons, who is not Muslim, promotes interfaith dialogue and tolerance.

In California, Muslim artists such as Liza Garza create poetry and jewelry, while Afghan-American multi-media artist Ariana Delawari celebrates her heritage in her music and documentary films. She recorded her album *Lion of Panjshir* in Afghanistan with three Afghan masters of classical tabla, rabab and dilruba. And Oklahoma-born and raised Kareem Salama effortlessly blends wisdom from ancient Islamic teachings into the storytelling heartland genre of country music.

Muslims in the United States are not homogeneous. They are ethnically diverse people who are equally diverse in talent, experience—and religious traditions.

Openness to the Unexpected

In the story about Nasraddin Hodja, his good intentions, positive outlook and openness to new experiences are what matter. These qualities still matter today. Successive waves of immigrants to the United States, many of whom were Muslim, have gained a foothold in their new country by opening businesses that add their own unique cultural values and traditions to American culture.

Entrepreneurial immigrants often begin with food. The ingredients of mutual understanding are served up in the red lentil soups of the local Turkish eatery or in an Afghan kebab shop in California's Silicon Valley. The proliferation of halal food carts in New York, falafel joints and shisha lounges in small towns nationwide shows how eagerly Americans embrace the food and customs of Muslim lands, as they have with many other immigrant cultures.

But American Muslims contribute more than food to the cultural mix. They are philanthropists, artists, filmmakers and writers. They launch innovative social media platforms. They are scientists and educators. They run businesses from coast to coast that employ thousands of workers. They are soldiers who bravely defend their country. They are positive, inclusive and open to the unexpected. They are Americans.

Opposite, clockwise from top, New Jersey-based filmmaker Anisa Mehdi, here on location in Mecca, 2003, was the first American woman to film the hajj for TV. Marketing consultant Tarek El-Messidi founded CelebrateMercy to educate people about Islam. AdMob founder Omar Hamoui is now a venture capitalist with Sequoia Capital in California's Silicon Valley. The famous Halal Guys food cart attracts a crowd of hungry New Yorkers.

THE HALAL GUYS

admob
main office

CHICAGO

Muslims in Chicago, America's third most-populous metropolitan area, reflect the diversity of American Muslims nationwide. Together they have built a vibrant and growing network of mosques and civic institutions.

Southeastern Europeans, fleeing the instability that led to World War I, were among the first Muslims to settle in Chicago. Syrian and Palestinian Muslims joined them a decade later in search of economic opportunity. Their numbers expanded as native Chicagoans began converting to Islam in the early 1920s. And a shift in U.S. immigration policies in 1965 fueled a new wave of Muslim immigrants from South Asia. Today, Chicago's Muslim community is one of the largest and most diverse in the United States.

The Chicago metropolitan area is home to some 9.7 million people, more than 300,000 of whom are Muslim. They include immigrants from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, Muslims and converts born in the United States, young and old.

"There is no other place in the world where Muslims from different parts of the world have assembled together and established one community with so much diversity," said Dr. Mohammed

Today, 94 mosques dot the Chicago landscape.

Opposite, clockwise from top, many of Chicago's famous skyscrapers were designed by Fazlur Rahman Khan. People share a meal at the Downtown Islamic Center in Chicago. A young woman stands at the prayer room at the Islamic Foundation, Villa Park, Illinois. A man reads the Quran. Dome of the Muslim Association of Greater Rockford, Illinois.

300,000
Muslims
live in the
Chicago area

There is no other place where Muslims from different parts of the world have established one community with so much diversity.

Kaiseruddin, chairman of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago. But Chicago's Muslim community is not just diverse in its ethnic makeup. Many branches of Islam have taken root there. Sunni, Shiite and Sufi beliefs are all represented, and viewpoints range from conservative to progressive.

The story of IMAN is one of the vitality of Muslim identities and values in the United States.

More than Mosques

Before 1960, there were five mosques in Chicago. Today, 94 mosques dot the Chicago metropolitan area, and nearly 20 percent were built after 2001. That so many mosques have been built over the past decade testifies to the Muslim community's growth, wealth and civic engagement.

More than mosques alone, Chicago's Muslims have built vibrant civic organizations and communities. The Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), for example, addresses the harsher realities of urban life. Started in 1995 by Palestinian-American Rami Nashashibi, the nonprofit has grown to include services ranging from a high-quality, no-cost health clinic to an artistic space for cross-cultural engagement. IMAN's Takin' It to the Streets festival brings together multi-ethnic artists and musicians and tens of thousands of attendees to celebrate cultural diversity.

"The arts have become the real factor for us in both humanizing each other's stories, connecting our stories, and…revealing to one another the possibilities of what a better world can look like," Nashashibi told a gathering at the Chautauqua Institution in New York.

"The story of IMAN is just such an incredible story of the vitality of Muslim identities and values in the United States," said Scott Alexander, an associate professor of Islam at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Alexander added that there are thousands of stories like IMAN's across the country.

Chicago's Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) represents another such story. IFYC uses community service to develop college students into interfaith leaders. By partnering on projects such as building houses for low-income residents through Habitat for Humanity, a U.S.-based Christian community service organization, students form meaningful relationships with students of different faiths and gain a better understanding of and appreciation for all religious backgrounds.

"I run with a very particular set of Muslims," said IFYC's founder Eboo Patel, "and we feel the best thing about America is that we can have a positive impact, that this is a nation that welcomes the contributions of its citizens."

Above, Interfaith Youth Core founder Eboo Patel. Opposite, left to right, Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) director Rami Nashashibi. Creative expression rules at the IMAN Community Café. Young people work in the IMAN community garden.

Calls to Prayer Beyond Chicago

The voice of Chicago's vibrant Muslim community is heard and heeded well beyond the shores of Lake Michigan. Since 1988, Chicago-based Sound Vision has produced newsletters, documentaries and radio programs that help Muslims in more than 28 countries, including the United States and Canada, find ways to practice their faith within a Western context.

Sound Vision operates the United States' only daily Muslim radio show, *Radio Islam*. The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre of Jordan called *Radio Islam* "not only a source of support for Muslims, but an important educational link to non-Muslims in the greater Chicago area."

The president of Sound Vision, Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid, is the chair of the Board of Trustees for the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, one of the world's largest interfaith organizations. "In Chicago, I have seen how interfaith conversations have led to churches, mosques and synagogues working together for real civic change," Mujahid said. ❧

*profiles :

Tayyibah Taylor
magazine editor

> "Muslim women in America have on one hand their American legacy of freedom of speech, freedom of movement and an academic legacy of critical thinking. And on their Islamic side, they have a legacy of autonomy and spiritual agency," said Tayyibah Taylor, co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Azizah*, a magazine for and by American Muslim women. Taylor founded *Azizah* with business partner and creative director Marlina "Nina" Soerakoesoemah. The team launched its first issue in 2000. Today, the publication boasts a circulation of 40,000.

With its content written, edited and designed entirely by Muslim women, *Azizah* offers a space to hear the unfiltered voices of American Muslim women. For Trinidad-born Taylor and Indonesia-born Soerakoesoemah, respecting the community's diversity of thought is critical to fulfilling the magazine's mission. Taylor lives in Atlanta, and Soerakoesoemah in Redmond, Washington.

"We feel if we are really going to be a space for Muslim women's voices, we have to reflect the diversity," Taylor said. "We're at the stage where we're building social institutions, and on the edge of that is the media."

Azizah won Folio Eddie Awards in 2010, 2012 and 2013 for editorial excellence.

"To quote a powerful woman, Eleanor Roosevelt, 'You must do the thing you think you cannot do.' ...It is in the doing that one makes a dream and a hope a reality."

> Tayyibah Taylor

Fazlur Rahman Khan

> structural engineer

From the Blue Mosque to the Alhambra, Islamic culture is renowned for its achievements in architecture and engineering. But many don't realize that Chicago's most celebrated skyscrapers were built by a Muslim engineer, after whom the city named a street, Fazlur R. Khan Way.

Born in Dhaka in1929 in the area that would become Bangladesh, Fazlur R. Khan came to the United States in 1952 as a Fulbright scholar to attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he earned master's degrees in applied mechanics and structural engineering and a doctorate in structural engineering.

Khan joined Chicago's prestigious architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in 1955. From Chicago's 37-story Brunswick Building and the 43-story DeWitt Chestnut Apartments to the 100-story John Hancock Center and the 110-story Willis (formerly Sears) Tower, Khan forged collaborations between architects and engineers that broke new ground in the industry. In many ways, Chicago is his monument, a physical representation of Khan's skill as he pushed himself—and his buildings—to new heights.

His international work includes Saudi Arabia's King Abdulaziz University and the Hajj Terminal at King Abdulaziz International Airport, for which he won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Khan died in 1982, but his legacy is embodied in newer skyscrapers, including Dubai's Burj Khalifa, now the world's tallest building.

* reached record-breaking heights

Fazlur Khan

Hassan Hakmoun

> musician

Six hundred years ago, descendants of West African slaves brought Gnawa music north to Morocco. A mélange of West African rhythms and North African melodies, the music is used for healing.

"This music, it's completely close to God," said Hassan Hakmoun, a Moroccan-American musician who has been called an ambassador of Gnawa culture.

Hakmoun, who lives in Los Angeles, has expanded Gnawa music's reach. After moving to America in 1987, he began collaborating with musicians such as Miles Davis and Peter Gabriel. Those collaborations infused his style with elements of jazz, reggae, rock and funk. He says this fusion of rhythms, music and song seems to appeal to everyone.

Hakmoun has five albums to his credit. When not working on his own music, Hakmoun creates opportunities for other artists. In 1999, he helped establish Morocco's Gnawa Festival. A free-of-charge world music event, the festival is one of the world's largest music festivals.

For his success, Hakmoun credits America's openness to new artists and ideas. "America is the best country [in which] to learn so much about life, and religions, and respect," he said.

Hassan Hakmoun

* Gnawa music meets jazz, reggae, rock and funk

Ibtihaj Muhammad

> athlete

When Ibtihaj Muhammad removes her fencing mask, she sends a message to women and minorities everywhere. "I want them to know that nothing should hinder them from reaching their goals—not race, not religion, not gender," she said.

An observant Muslim of African-American descent, Muhammad has overcome many hurdles to become one of the world's top-ranked athletes in women's sabre, a discipline of fencing. Not the least of these challenges has been reconciling her religion's call for modesty with the customs of modern sports.

"I remember the feeling of being different from my friends because of my modest dress," Muhammad said.

Then one day, Muhammad and her mother spotted girls fencing at the local secondary school. They knew immediately it was a sport that would allow Muhammad to participate fully—without a special uniform.

In fencing, competitors wear protective, head-to-toe clothing.

"What is so cool about my involvement in fencing is I was able to find a sport that embraced my religious beliefs and my desire to wear a *hijab*," she explained.

Muhammad is the first athlete on the United States' national fencing team to compete in domestic, Pan American and World championship games while wearing a head scarf.

* fences with the best

Ibtihaj Muhammad

Tamim Ansary

> author

Born in Afghanistan, author Tamim Ansary brought the storytelling talents of his forebears with him when, as a teenager, he moved to California. Today he directs the San Francisco Writers Workshop, the oldest continuous free writers workshop in America. He is an award-winning author of several books, including *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World through Islamic Eyes*; his memoir, *West of Kabul, East of New York;* and, most recently, *Games Without Rules*, a history of modern Afghanistan. This descendant of 18th-century Afghan mystic Sa'duddin also teaches courses at the University of California, Berkeley, and San Francisco State University.

At an early age his imagination was fired by his elders' oral histories of epic battles and magical landscapes. "Everything I write today goes back to those earliest sources," he says, adding, "I'm absorbed, still, in that conversation that my father and his peers were part of once, only I've graduated to the table now, and the table has expanded across the globe."

Tamim Ansary

* storytelling in the Afghan tradition

Hakeem "The Dream" Olajuwon

professional basketball player

Basketball star Hakeem Olajuwon, dubbed "The Dream" for his deft footwork, came to the United States from his native Nigeria in 1980 to play for the University of Houston Cougars. His professional basketball career began in 1984, as a center for the National Basketball Association (NBA) team the Houston Rockets, where he spent 17 seasons. He was a 12-time NBA all-star and helped the Rockets to win two NBA championships. When he retired in 2002, the Rockets retired his number and erected a statue of him at their home stadium. He was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame in 2008.

Today he coaches players at his free Big Man Camp in Houston and helps professional players such as Kobe Bryant and LeBron James improve their games.

"It's a great honor for me, of course, to have the best in the game coming down," Olajuwon told *USA Today*.

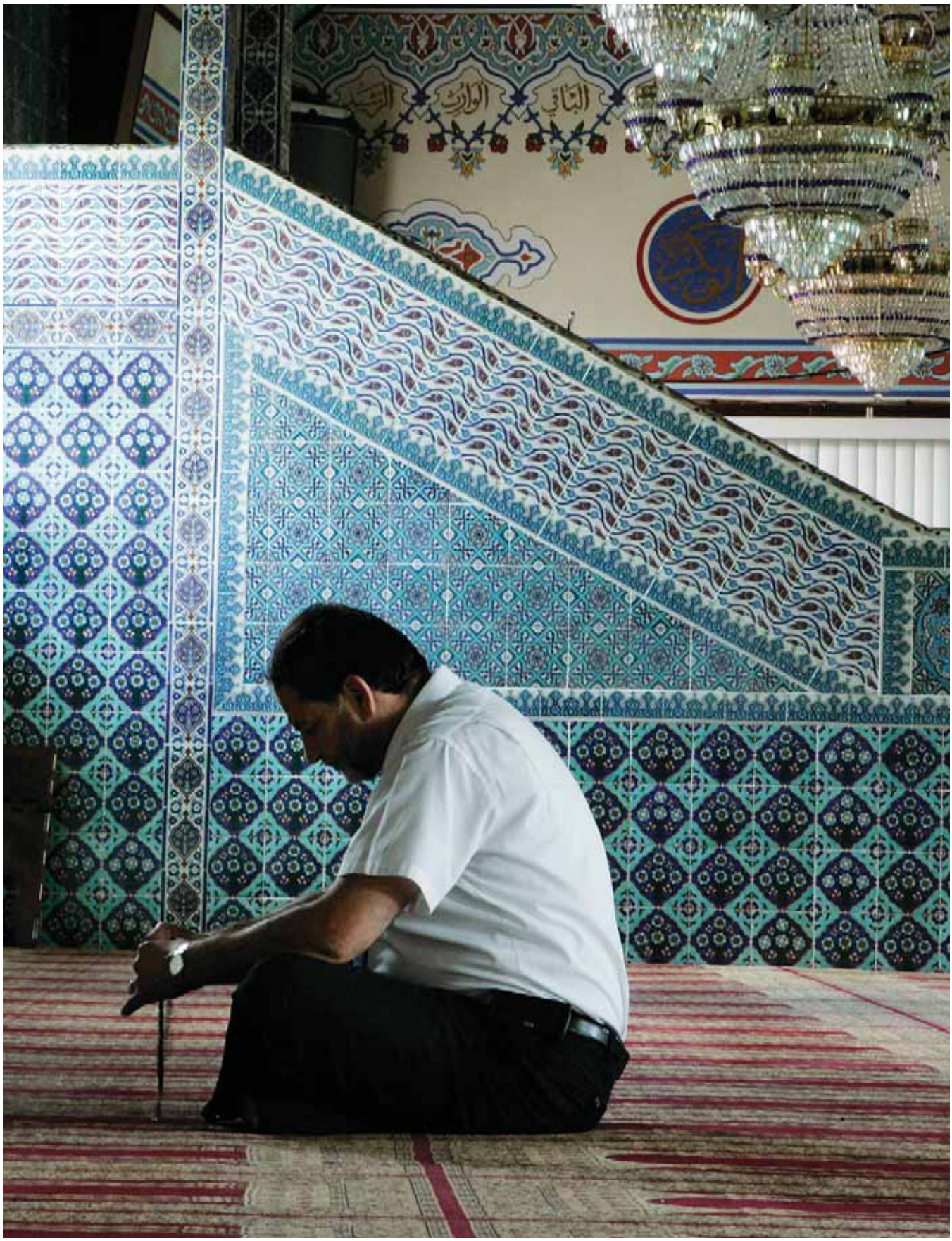
"You play competitively, but you don't do things that are cheating or unfair or foul play. You report to a higher authority."

> Hakeem Olajuwon

"The challenge to me is whether or not I can add value: for them to go back, not for the audience, but so they themselves realize what they can accomplish. That's my joy."

Above, Olajuwon coaches players at his free camp in Houston, Texas.

HOUSTON
34
SPALDING
NBA


الباقي
الوارث

How do American Muslims live their religion?

1025

I am a third-generation *Muslimah* and descendant of Africans once enslaved in America, and I am immensely grateful for my country's first liberty: religious freedom. I feel blessed to belong to the most diverse Muslim community in the world, with coreligionists from every race, ethnicity and Islamic background.

by
Precious Rasheeda Muhammad

Left, a family leaves the Masjid Omar ibn Al-Khattab in Los Angeles after Ramadan prayers. Preceding page, a man prays at the United Islamic Center in Paterson, New Jersey.

And, as a historian, I deeply appreciate that before Muslims had a truly representative voice in America, there was tolerance for and efforts to protect the practice of Islam on American soil. Even more compelling to me is that non-Muslims took the lead on this.

For example, in 1730s colonial Maryland, a slave owner established a place of prayer for Ayuba Sulayman Diallo, an enslaved African-born imam who could write entire copies of the Quran from memory, according to his biography, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job* (1734). In that same decade, Benjamin Franklin—an American Founding Father, inventor and diplomat—helped establish a non-denominational preaching house in Philadelphia to welcome preachers of any faith, including Muslims.

And, in 1788, Founder James Madison, who became the fourth U.S. president, raised concerns about threats to the legal rights of Muslims and other religious minorities to worship freely. He later wrote the First Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion, among other rights.

As a result, Muslims have long enjoyed the right to practice their faith in the United States and openly uphold the *arkan al-Islam* (pillars of Islam). And the same is true for adherents of other religions and their faith requirements. For example, in the cities I have lived in across the United States, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons often come knocking on my door to spread the good news of their religions, and more than once I have invited them in for a chat. Not surprisingly, Americans tend to be not only religiously diverse, but tolerant and knowledgeable about others' religious beliefs and practices. When the popular American television game show *Jeopardy!* recently featured a Ramadan-related question, I delightedly observed how a non-Muslim contestant answered it correctly without missing a beat.

Above, the domed ceiling of the King Fahad Mosque, Culver City, California. Opposite, clockwise from top left, people arrive for a prayer service at the Islamic Cultural Center of New York. The Dar Al-Islam Mosque in Abiquiu, New Mexico. International exchange students visit the Islamic Center of Washington. A Muslim family prays at Montrose Beach, Chicago.

Shahadah

"*La 'ilaha 'illa-llah, Muhammad-ur-rasulu-llah*," a woman declared during the 2001 Islam in America conference at Harvard University. Without asking permission, she walked up to the microphone and took her *shahadah* during a break. Though there were a few curious looks, no one in the religiously diverse audience attempted to stop her for this public religious display at the secular, academic event. As the chair of the conference, I was actually concerned that there would be some negative reaction when it happened, but there was not.

Salat

I often tell audiences that, when the *adhan* was heard three stories above New York City's famed Union Square in 1893, the *New York Times* published an article the next day headlined "New York's First Muezzin Call," expressing surprise that the "melodious call" had not been heard earlier in cosmopolitan New York. Today, the *adhan* can be heard in cities throughout the United States, followed by Muslims making *salat* in mosques, or in a quiet corner at an airport, an office, a public park, and even at the U.S. Capitol.

I have a "love-it-and-make-it-better" relationship with America. To make it better for people of all faiths, and no faith, is for me an Islamic imperative.

Sawm

American Muslims have full latitude to fulfill their *sawm* obligations. Iftars are held everywhere from college campuses to churches to the White House, building community across religions and cultures. Sometimes, non-Muslims fast in solidarity with Muslim colleagues, family

Above, left to right, participants stand beside the urban garden at the Zakat Foundation Community Center in Chicago. Students work at Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California. Islamic Relief USA volunteers aid victims of Hurricane Sandy.

members and friends. The start of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr are recognized in some public schools; grocers stock dates for Muslim consumers; and some major retailers even wish Muslims "Happy Ramadan" and "Happy Eid al-Fitr" in their advertisements.

Zakat and Muslim Philanthropy

From coast to coast, American Muslims young and old respond when there is need. From the California-based ILM (Intellect, Love and Mercy) Foundation to New Jersey-based SMILE to Islamic Relief USA, American Muslims help at-risk communities and respond to crises in the United States and abroad through volunteering, fundraising and disseminating resources. For example, I will never forget the beauty of witnessing, in 1995, Bosnian refugees being hosted and housed in a *masjid* in the Washington area.

Hajj

It is common to find large groups of Muslims gathered at U.S. airports to give a joyous send-off to pilgrims on their way to hajj, or to welcome them back upon their return. Hajj events are often held so that returnees can share the blessings of the journey with those who have not yet been able to make the righteous pilgrimage.

Sister Clara Mohammed School in Boston, right next door to a *masjid*—formerly a synagogue—is where I first learned about the rites of hajj. Many Muslim children's first introduction to this pillar of Islam is during their attendance at Muslim schools, weekend or full-time, where the rites of hajj are re-enacted to educate young Muslims.

Islamic educational institutions enjoy a respected place in American society, even attracting non-Muslim students. These include schools from elementary through high schools. The Mohammed Schools in Atlanta, Georgia, is one example, as well as institutions of higher learning such as Berkeley's Zaytuna College and Chicago's American Islamic College.

America: Love It and Make It Better

American Muslims practice their faith freely and participate fully in American life.

The late Imam W.D. Mohammed—who, when I was a child, taught me Arabic at a Chicago *masjid*—spoke at President-elect Bill Clinton's 1993 inaugural interfaith prayer service, held at the historic Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington. In a message about racial equality, universal brotherhood and interfaith unity, the imam opened with the following remarks to a mostly non-Muslim audience:

"Our prophet said, he saw in a vision, the followers of Moses, the followers of Christ Jesus, and his followers, peace be upon the prophets, in heaven, in paradise."

The event marked the first time in the nation's history that a Muslim played a formal role in presidential inaugural events.

This is the America I know: a country with religious liberty for all. It is not perfect, but I have a "love-it-and-make-it-better" relationship with America. As a citizen, to make it better for people of all faiths, and no faith, is for me an Islamic imperative. ❧

Iftars are held everywhere from college campuses to churches to the White House.

Above, dates are passed at a Duke University iftar.

Two years ago an imam, a rabbi and a priest prayed together in front of an abandoned building located on a Chicago block that is home to the Inner-City Muslim Action Network and to St. Rita of Cascia Catholic Parish. The organizers, activists, community leaders, politicians, parents and schoolchildren present that day had reclaimed the building as their own.

by
Rami
Nashashibi

Author Rami Nashashibi founded the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) with community leaders and students in 1995 to respond to the needs of inner-city residents. Left, volunteers paint a mural on the wall of IMAN's building on the South Side of Chicago.

They had painted over the gang graffiti with colorful murals and cleaned the backyard of its broken glass, soiled clothes and rusting needles before preparing the ground for a community garden. In front of this crowd of engaged citizens, the clerics declared that the people of their community would work for peace and a dignified quality of life for their families.

Social and civic activism in the United States has long been characterized by organizers and leaders working across racial, ethnic and religious lines to challenge the nation to live up to the principles of justice and equality on which it was founded. Throughout U.S. history, individuals of different faiths have banded together to advance justice and equality, seeking common ground to build stronger communities. From 19th-century anti-slavery activists to 20th-century social reformers like Dorothy Day, Malcolm X and

Martin Luther King Jr., people of different faith communities have been at the center of such social activism. Today American Muslims are a growing part of this tradition.

As a person who has spent close to half his life working for social justice, the spirit of outreach and cooperation has indelibly shaped the way I think about America, my faith and life goals. I believe the road to true respect and mutual understanding for American Muslims and their neighbors continues to be through the process of locking arms across faith communities.

Above, an IMAN tee-shirt. Opposite, clockwise from top, IMAN runs this neighborhood free clinic in southwest Chicago. A man volunteers for IMAN's Heal the 'Hood campaign. Volunteers work on a community garden.

The Animating Spirit of Islam

My experience has shown that the Muslim community has an extraordinary amount to offer when it comes to building communities that better exemplify America's higher and still not fully realized ideals. This conviction has driven much of our work at IMAN over the last two decades. Connecting the disconnected while fighting for dignity and a better life for those on the margins of society is what undergirds our collective work with black Pentecostal churches, synagogues and communities of all different backgrounds. It is what has inspired us to bring imams, priests and rabbis and their congregants together with the larger community of organizers and residents from across diverse neighborhoods on a number of occasions.

That day two years ago at the stoop of the abandoned building was one such moment. Through petitioning the city, we were able to reclaim and eventually acquire the site. More than that, we were able to bring the city of Chicago, among other sponsors, into a unique partnership to provide the financial support necessary for IMAN to turn the abandoned building into an environmentally conscientious training facility for a program we call Green Reentry: a job-training, leadership-development and housing program for formerly incarcerated people of all faiths.

Our collective commitment to realizing our spiritual principles can propel us and the United States ever closer to creating a world more reflective of the ideals of equality, justice and human dignity that animate myriad religious traditions. ❧

IMAN
IMAN HEALTH CLINIC

ROCK STEADY CREW
TINARIWEN
MOS BROTHER
D'FALI
KINDRED
THE FAMILY SOUL

The week before Ramadan, I ordered a $65 jumbo box of medjool dates. "By the grace of God, 100% organic," the advertisement read. "Highest quality." I find myself thinking, "At that price, they'd better be." One more thing ticked off my list. As the designated cook in my Muslim household, the holy month of fasting means stocking up on food.

by
G. Willow
Wilson

Preparation of the delicious meal that ends each fast day is part of the observance, says author G. Willow Wilson.

When you're only eating one big meal a day, you've got to make it count. During the day, Ramadan might be a month of self-discipline and restraint, but at night it becomes a time of feasting: Seasonal eats enjoyed with family and friends are as big a part of the month's festivities in America as anywhere else the fast is observed.

Our local community in Seattle is very diverse, so gatherings are a combination of many different cultural traditions: Tunisian friends bring flasks of minted green tea; Egyptians, platters of flaky dessert pastries to be placed alongside home-cooked American staples like fried chicken and biscuits. Something special happens

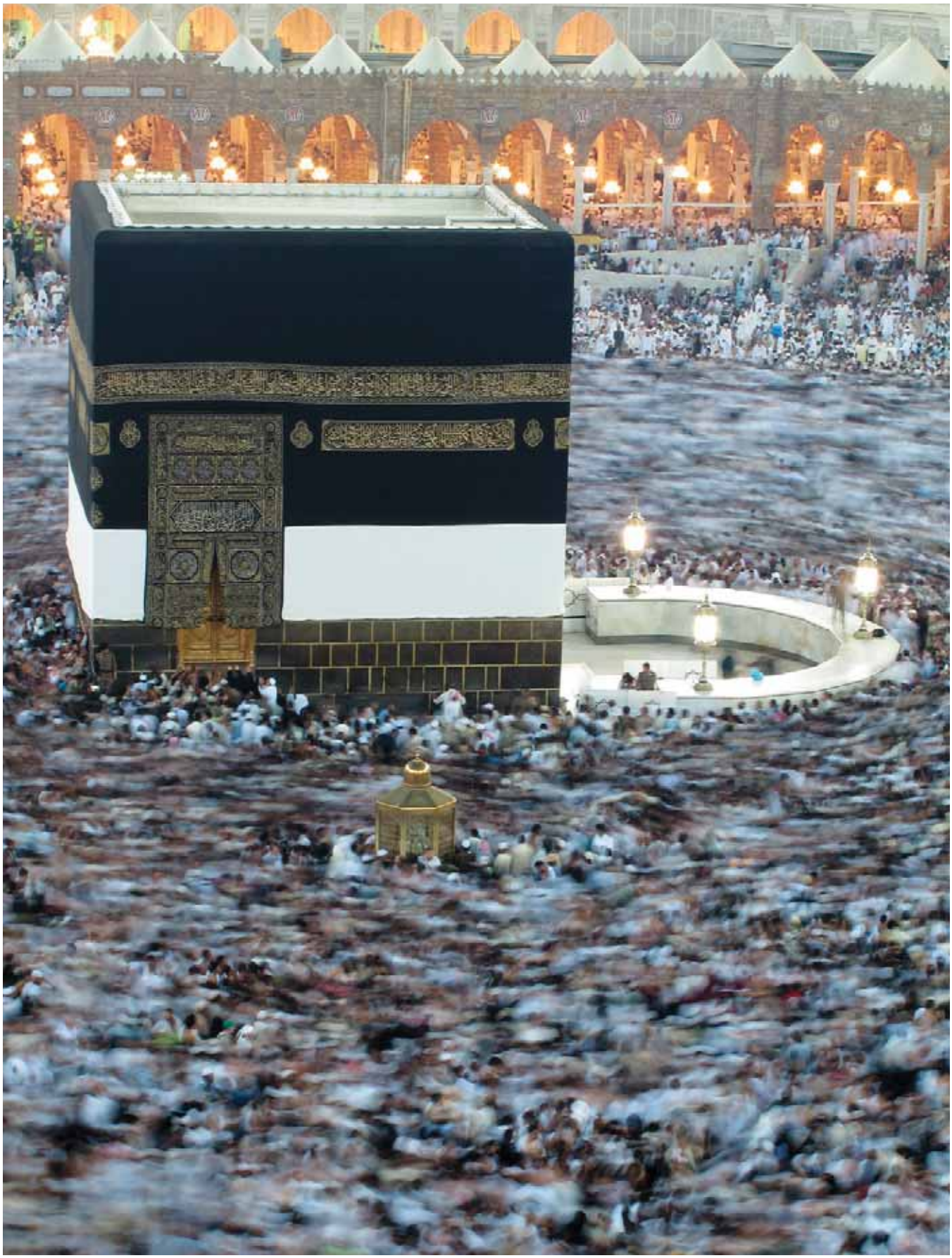
at that wonderful moment when the call to prayer rises up from the nearest iPhone (there's an app for that) and you descend on a table of lovingly prepared traditional foods.

Yes, Ramadan is a time for spiritual reflection, a month when Muslims around the world deepen their practice through fasting, reciting Quran and giving to charity. And whenever anybody takes a moment to rhapsodize about the food, there is inevitably one person waiting in the wings to say, "Food is not the point. You shouldn't even be thinking about food." Okay, brother. But who do you think is making that biryani you eat at sunset? It doesn't cook itself.

For me, preparing the evening meal has itself become a form of *ibadah*: an act of worship and striving for God. Even a dish you've cooked a hundred times before gets tricky when you can't taste as you go and adjust the ingredients accordingly. Is there too much salt? Not enough garlic? You won't know until sunset, when you and your guests will find out at the same moment whether your instincts served you well. Cooking while fasting is a unique experience, not least because you're surrounded by the perfume of food you can't eat. Very early on, I discovered that I'm never tempted to sneak a bite of something—if anything, cooking the evening meal serves to emphasize the purpose of my fast, defining my service both to God and to the people who will break their fasts with the food I've prepared.

Above, noodles are prepared for the Eid al-Fitr feast. Opposite, top, morning prayers begin the Eid al-Fitr celebration that ends Ramadan at a Silver Spring, Maryland, mosque. Below, business associates break their fast at a networking iftar at a restaurant in Washington.

Eating good food with people you love brings an essential but often overlooked element to religious practice: joy. You're filled with gratitude to God to be sitting at that table (or in traditional households, on that floor) with those particular friends, able to enjoy a meal together after a day of intense abstinence. A lot of people around the world aren't so lucky. Part of the point of Ramadan is remembering how fortunate you are, and endeavoring to make life a little better for people who have less. Even as we enjoy our evening meal, prayers and alms are winging their way to those for whom the sun sets on war, famine and heartbreak. As we open our homes and tables to our friends, we open our hearts to you. ❧



"How does it feel to knock out one whole pillar of Islam?" my brother quipped on my return to California from the hajj. The other four pillars of Islam —witness, prayer, charity and fasting—are things you do throughout your life. The hajj happens in five days. I felt spiritually renewed, I told him, but I felt overwhelmed by the hajj in many ways.

by
Mas'ood
Cajee

Left, among the pilgrims circling the Kaaba in the holy city of Mecca are many from the United States. Author Mas'ood Cajee describes one American Muslim's preparation for the hajj.

The annual pilgrimage to the ancient city of Mecca and its environs, known as the hajj, is obligatory on every mature Muslim who has the means to undertake it. In 2013, 14,000 Americans performed the pilgrimage. I was lucky to be one of them. We joined more than 2 million pilgrims from around the world.

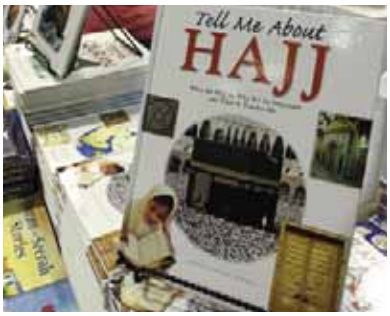
The word hajj means "something overwhelming." Carried out annually for at least 4,000 years, since the time of Abraham and Hagar according to Islamic tradition, it has come to represent a homecoming for all Muslims, as well as a chance for individual redemption.

The hajj today is not the largest religious gathering —India's Kumbh Mela and Muslim gatherings in Iraq and Bangladesh are actually larger. Nevertheless, the hajj is unique, diverse and growing in size.

Early in the 20th century, attendance waned. According to Saudi government sources, arriving pilgrims numbered only 50,000 in 1965. By 1975, however, that number had reached 500,000. By 1985, more than 1 million pilgrims came. In the 2000s, the numbers have topped the 3 million mark.

What changed? Historically, pilgrims arrived by land and sea. With the advent of the Boeing 707 in the late 1950s and later the Boeing 747 jumbo jet, the mega-hajj was born. The modern mega-hajj owes much of its size to American invention and enterprise in Seattle, Washington's aircraft industry.

Today, most pilgrims arrive on chartered flights at Jeddah's massive Hajj Terminal. They come direct from locales like Sokoto,



Above, left to right, pilgrims circumambulate the Kaaba inside the Grand Mosque during the hajj in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Islamic educational books are displayed. The Hajj Terminal at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah was designed by American Fazlur R. Khan.

Surabaya and Ürümqi, and transit hubs like Singapore and Dubai. Used only during the hajj season as a gateway for pilgrims, the Hajj Terminal, completed in 1982, is an architectural marvel designed by an American Muslim, Fazlur Rahman Khan. He is considered one of the 20th century's greatest structural engineers, whose design feats include such Chicago landmarks as the John Hancock and Willis (Sears) towers.

Preparing for Pilgrimage U.S.-Style

I planned for several years to make the hajj and saved the money to go. Early in 2013, I missed the sign-up deadline for the popular group I wanted to join. Then, less than two months before the hajj, I responded to a Facebook post from the charismatic young Silicon Valley imam, Tahir Anwar, who leads that hajj group. He had 10 extra visas. I got one of them and hurriedly obtained my vaccines from our local San Joaquin County public health clinic.

Anyone going for hajj is expected to ask family and friends for forgiveness, but I didn't have time to do it in person. I email-blasted

them, from California to South Africa. Fortunately, no one denied forgiveness. Family members responded with prayer requests and encouraging tips. Be patient on the trip, most urged.

I needed pilgrim gear, above all sturdy sandals. Most American pilgrims seem to wear Crocs or Teva sandals. I was surprised to find not only sandals but the recommended prayer manuals on the U.S.-based Internet marketer Amazon.com. They really do sell everything! American Muslim publishers have begun putting out attractive English translations of prayer manuals. In the past, religious books would come from Lahore, New Delhi or Beirut, but mine came straight from Southern California.

The final item in the pilgrim's arsenal is of recent vintage and more controversial than other travel necessities: the smartphone. Before even departing the United States, our group received Mobily SIM cards. Mobily, the largest Saudi mobile company, has a major presence at the hajj. In Jeddah's Hajj Terminal, a large Mobily billboard features a South Asian father and son who have paused—while circumambulating the Kaaba—to call home. Once restricted by authorities, photography and gadgetry are now allowed at sacred sites.

American ingenuity in Mecca is represented by more than jumbo jets, architecture and iPhones. Popular U.S. fast-food restaurants abound, and many pilgrims stay at U.S. hotel franchises such as the Hilton, Hyatt, Ramada and Holiday Inn chains.

In 2013, 14,000 Americans performed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Above, a man reads the Quran on an iPhone.

The Impact of Hajj

Modern innovations help pilgrims navigate the hajj, but the core experience remains as it has for centuries: deeply spiritual and centered around prayer and harmony with other participants of all colors and nationalities. I thought a lot about the impact and legacy of Malcolm X. It was during his hajj in 1964 that Malcolm saw blacks and whites break bread together as brothers and sisters.

The diversity of hajj today is mirrored in the mix of the American hajjis. My small group of Californians looked like the hajj: It represented a wide variety of cultures and colors. What crossed my mind in the final days of hajj, as I met and marched with pilgrims from around the world in their ethnic or national dress, was how much we share, our hopes and fears, and what a small world it actually is. ❧

*in their own words

Imam Khalid Latif

University chaplain and executive director of the Islamic Center at New York University

"As a Muslim I am able to practice my faith. I pray five times a day....I give my zakat. I fast during Ramadan. I went to hajj in 2005 and I'm able to build my *masjids* and do what my religion tells me to do....[The United States] allows me to practice my faith just as much as it allows someone from a different religious background to practice their faith."

"There's a separation between church and state here that I think is a beneficial thing....In dealing with a diverse society and diverse population, there has to be a freedom for individuals to be able to explore something that is as personal and communal as religion without a government saying you have to do it this way...."

Imam Latif was appointed chaplain of the New York Police Department at age 24, the youngest to hold that post. He lectures throughout the United States.

"There are many individuals who have memorized the entire Quran here. They've done it entirely here. You have different programs and schools that are set up where people can go through a more traditional mode of learning...everything that you would learn if you were studying to be a religious scholar."

"One of the key things you want to understand about the Muslim community in the United States is that it is an extremely diverse community. You have Muslims who are from pretty much every country in the world, speak every language. They are wealthy and they are poor and everything in between."

Imam Shamsi Ali

Al-Hikmah Mosque * Jamaica Muslim Center
Queens, New York

> "Historically America is an immigrant country. And so Muslims happen to be mostly at the moment immigrants, but I think they are already integrating beautifully to the mainstream American society. So we are Americans, [who] happen to follow a certain religion called Islam. Being Muslims in America, I think we are not an exception from other communities."

"...American values essentially are in line with Islamic values. And that is about freedom, justice, tolerance. It is about the pursuit of happiness."

Imam Ali is the former head of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York. He immigrated to the United States from Indonesia.

"In America, secularism simply means that government doesn't have any right to decide any religion for any person, but America protects the right of everyone to practice their religion, private or public."

Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat

Co-founder, An-Nur Mosque * President, Islamic Affairs Council of Maryland

"Muslims do not have any problems practicing their faith in America. They pray. They have their mosques. They can take off from work to go and pray and come back.... I, myself, I pray in the airports. I pray in the malls. I pray everywhere. And this is becoming natural for us today as Americans. We practice our religion everywhere."

"Employers today are becoming....familiar with the concept of fasting, so they are more lenient with their employees when it comes to Ramadan. But the most important thing about Ramadan in America is that it's becoming a month where...Muslims from different parts of the world who are in America are getting together in the mosques to break the fast together."

Imam Arafat, born in Damascus, Syria, has lectured across the U.S. and served Muslims in Baltimore since the 1980s. He was imam of the Islamic Society of Baltimore and founded the An-Nur Institute for Islamic Studies.

"...Today Ramadan is becoming a month of outreach. It's becoming a month of inviting our neighbors, colleagues, friends who are non-Muslims to come and experience a meal of breaking the fast, iftar."

"American society...[is] about diversity. Regardless of who you are, you can make it here in this country. To me, this is the essence of the message of Quran and the teachings of Prophet Mohammed and the teachings of the prophet Jesus and Moses and those prophets."

*profiles :

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf
president, Zaytuna College

Eminent Islamic scholar and lecturer, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, now in his mid-50s, was only 18 when he converted to Islam. "I just decided that I would study all the religions and see which one made the most sense to me....I became Muslim just reading. I read the Quran." He also spent 10 years living and studying Islam and Arabic in the Emirates, England, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Spain, "with no money, nothing, just trust."

The experience was formative, and would lead him to co-found Zaytuna Institute in 1996, which grew into today's Zaytuna College, the first liberal arts college based on Islamic traditions in the United States, in Berkeley, California.

"I grew up in a liberal arts tradition. So when I went to the Muslim world and studied in the madrassa system, what really floored me was realizing this is the same tradition, it's just a different version of it," he said. "Cultural erudition was one of the most highly prized qualities of individuals in the Muslim world."

Hamza Yusuf's vision for Zaytuna is to preserve and perpetuate such erudition. "We are trying to do a hybrid, which is to educate people in a humanistic Islamic tradition," offering time-honored tools of study. Zaytuna courses are bilingual, in English and Arabic, mirroring the study of Greek, Latin and English in classical Western curricula.

Beyond logic and rhetoric, Hamza Yusuf believes inculcating good moral character, respect and humane values is essential to education and society. One goal of Zaytuna College is to produce religious leaders who are equally cognizant of Islamic traditions and American culture, so they can meet the pastoral needs of American Muslims.

"Every civilization —Hindu, Buddhist, Confucianist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim—all of them understood that learning was to make a better human being."

> Shaykh Hamza Yusuf

Muslim Youth Camp

> a popular summer pastime

High in the mountains of California, 200 young people and their families gather every August for a weeklong summer camp, a standard feature of American childhood. Amid the typical camp sounds—campfire sing-alongs, high dives into pools, feet marching on a morning hike—campers also hear the Muslim call to prayer. The Muslim Youth Camp of California (MYC), founded in 1962, is a summer camp with a unique mission: impart Muslim traditions and beliefs as the basis of a strong sense of Muslim identity and thus contribute to broader American society.

Founded by Pakistani immigrant Marghoob Quraishi and his wife, Iffat, a convert from Protestant Christianity who attended church summer camps as a child, MYC has graduated American Muslims who have become community leaders and participants in the American dream. Tech millionaires, senior government officials, prize-winning journalists and other notable Americans are among those who have spent part of their formative years at MYC.

"We originally set out to create a safe space for youth who at the time felt they were the only Muslims in their school," explained Iffat Quraishi. "What we ended up with, however, was something much bigger: the seeds of a unique identity firmly rooted in faith and enhanced by everything America has to offer."

* an all-American summer camp

Muslim Youth Camp

Sameer Sarmast

> halal food entrepreneur

"What is halal?" Sameer Sarmast asked rhetorically. "It's not just a food cart, you know."

Sarmast, along with his business partners Saad Malik and Faraz Khan, want to make American Muslims and non-Muslims alike aware of all that halal has to offer. To spread the word, the New Jersey trio produces the Web show Sameer's Eats. Since its premiere in 2010, the series has earned a dedicated following.

The Sameer's Eats team also launched the Halal Food Tour, which debuted in five U.S. cities in 2013: Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York and Washington. Comedy routines, cooking demonstrations and culinary challenges—in addition to dozens of halal food vendors—were all included on the bill of fare.

Sarmast and Malik use Facebook to promote their tours. They got the idea for a national tour after organizing a small halal food festival in New Jersey. "We saw the Facebook page had 900 RSVPs, so we thought…500–1,000 people might come," Malik said. They were surprised when more than 3,000 hungry people came to the event.

"Food is a common denominator," Sarmast said. "No matter what religion, what ethnic background, what you believe in, food will bring people together."

Sameer Sarmast

* showing what halal offers

Boy Scouts * Girl Scouts

> building strong values

Each year, nearly 3 million American youth participate in the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of the United States of America, organizations that have been shaping America's youth for more than a century. Like other Americans before them, Muslim families sought a place at the Scouting table, eager to integrate Muslim youth into American society without compromising their religious ideals. And Scouting welcomed Muslims with open arms, seeing in Muslim Scouts a shared respect for Scouting's core values.

And participating Scouts seem to agree. "We went on hikes, jamborees and flag drills," explained Mas'ood Cajee, who grew up as a member of Islamic Scouting Troop 322 in Seattle. "We were young American Muslims, at one with Allah and the Constitution."

In addition to earning merit badges for sports, citizenship and crafts, U.S. Scouts can earn the "Bismillah" emblem through basic knowledge of Islam and the "In the Name of God" emblem for advanced Islamic knowledge and practice, which helps Scouts fulfill the Scout Promise: "On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country." Outstanding adult leaders may earn the "Allahu Akbar" emblem.

* Islamic ideals meet scouting ideals

U.S. Scouting

Shamil Idriss

> CEO, Soliya

"The explosion in media technologies has really connected us as a human race like never before across great distances and differences," says Shamil Idriss, chief executive officer of the nonprofit Soliya, which promotes cooperative relations between societies through new media.

Soliya combines social media with cross-cultural educational exchanges to encourage understanding between Muslim and Western countries. Idriss credits the access to information offered by new media for "the profound shift from content to conversation."

Idriss was already a veteran in using media for social change and conflict resolution when he joined Soliya in 2009 with the goal of facilitating interaction among young people from different cultures, religions and countries in a virtual space. Today Soliya's online educational Connect Program has participants at more than 100 universities in 27 countries across the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, Europe and North America.

Shamil Idriss

* new media for educational exchange

Zakat

American Muslims give to others

Islamic giving is widespread across the United States and beyond. Many non-Muslim Americans first learn about their Muslim neighbors through zakat. The inner-city poor who are treated at the free Umma Community Clinic in Los Angeles, California, learn firsthand about Muslim generosity. Only 2 percent of the patients there are Muslim, according to the clinic.

Volunteers working alongside disaster relief teams from the Zakat Foundation of America in the aftermath of a devastating tornado in Oklahoma or the widespread destruction of Hurricane Sandy, or preparing winter kits for Syrian refugees, likewise learn of the importance of charity to American Muslims.

The Zakat Foundation, Islamic Relief USA and other faith-based charities provide food and medical aid, and community- and skill-building tools in the United States and around the world in times of conflict, famine or in the wake of natural calamities. Another American Muslim charity is Helping Hand for Relief and Development, which is lauded for its ability to deliver effective aid.

American Muslims increasingly join hands with friends in other faiths. An example is the Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, where Muslims volunteer alongside Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Baha'is to serve local families and elderly in need and respond to international disasters and refugee crises.

Above, Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA) volunteers. Opposite, clockwise from top left, American Students for Service USA volunteers work at a cassava farm co-op in Ghana. Volunteers rebuild a hiking trail in Black Pond Woods, Michigan. Young people donate time on the annual IRUSA "Day of Dignity."

DAY OF DIGNITY
DONATE ADVOCATE PARTICIPATE
ISLAMIC RELIEF USA

What do American Muslims do?

One great benefit of being a journalist reporting on religion is that I get to meet American Muslims from many walks of life. Throughout a 30-year career, I've met Muslims who have brought innovation, diversity and fertile ideas to American life.

by
Anisa Mehdi

Left, Anisa Mehdi filming against the New York City skyline. Preceding page, after co-founding YouTube in 2005, Jawed Karim pursued a graduate degree in computer science at Stanford University and started a venture capital fund to help university students develop and launch their business ideas.

I've interviewed physicians, businessmen and women, public servants, philanthropists, artists and educators, people like neuroscientist Dr. Fidelma O'Leary of Austin, Texas, who was a subject in my 2003 National Geographic documentary film *Inside Mecca*, and Abdul Alim Mubarak of Maplewood, New Jersey, who was an editor and producer at CNN when I documented his hajj in 1998.

I went into journalism at a time when it was unusual for Arab Americans and American Muslims to enter fields other than engineering and medicine. But in recent years, I've coached American Muslim journalism students and rookie reporters who recognize that being a journalist is a powerful way to engage society and one's fellow citizens.

My encounters with dynamic Muslims began early with my father, the late Dr. Mohammad T. Mehdi, who came to the United States from Iraq in 1949. He was part of a post-World War II wave of students who left their homelands

Above, left to right, volunteers help build a home in Holland, Ohio. After Superstorm Sandy devastated East Coast communities in 2012, volunteers of all faiths from Rebuilding Together helped New York area residents reconstruct their homes. Dr. Ismail Mehr of St. James Mercy Hospital in Hornell, New York, aids a medical team in Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.

seeking education and opportunity in "the West." Dad got a Ph.D. in American constitutional law at the University of California at Berkeley. That's where he met my mother, a Canadian-born Christian. My parents raised their three daughters to appreciate both Islam and Christianity at a time when interfaith marriages were rare.

Over the years, Muslims have become increasingly visible in many spheres of American life. American Muslim entrepreneurs have made their mark in businesses that serve both Muslim and broader American communities.

For example, Emergent BioSolutions in Maryland is the only government-approved producer of the anthrax vaccine and is a leading American biodefense contractor. Fuad El-Hibri, Emergent's founder and executive chairman of its board of directors, is also a major philanthropist. He chairs the board of the El-Hibri Charitable Foundation, which is "committed to building a better world by embracing the universally shared values of Islam—peace and social justice—through a rights-based approach to community engagement and the empowerment of disadvantaged people."

The El-Hibri foundation is not an aberration. American Muslims have donated tens of millions of dollars in disaster relief and thousands of volunteer hours to provide needed supplies and to rebuild homes and businesses. In the aftermath of the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010, volunteers from the Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA) were among the first to arrive. "We are commanded by our creator to help a fellow man in need," IMANA Medical Relief chair Dr. Ismail Mehr explained. "It's very clear in the Quran that to save one human life is as if you saved all of humanity."

Cherishing Tradition, Embracing the New

Every year, Americans of all backgrounds gather at their televisions on a Sunday in January or February to cheer on the two top U.S. American football teams. Back in 1998, I was directing a TV crew at Mona Tantawi's home in northern New Jersey on Super Bowl Sunday. The living room rocked with the shouts of teenaged fans applauding the Denver Broncos and the Green Bay Packers. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, the hostess led a team of eager foodies preparing an iftar. It was Ramadan.

Fasting "teaches a lot of strength," Dr. Tantawi, a pediatrician, told me in her office the next morning. She asked children to stick out their tongues and say "Ahhhh" as we talked about balancing the demands of faith with the responsibilities of living in America. "It gives us a lot of will, so whatever circumstances we are in we are able to adjust."

Tantawi is one of an estimated 20,000 Muslim physicians in the United States. Organizations like the Islamic Medical Association of North America and American Muslim Health Professionals promote awareness of Islamic medical ethics, provide medical and humanitarian relief and improve American health care.

Maha Elgenaidi, founder of the Islamic Networks Group, uses her skills to foster mutual understanding. She is currently endowment chairperson of this California-based organization that promotes interfaith dialogue and education about Islam, its traditions and contributions. She conducts seminars at universities, law enforcement agencies,

The Islamic Networks Group promotes interfaith dialogue and education about Islam, its traditions and contributions.

Above right, Maha Elgenaidi founded the Islamic Networks Group in 1993 to teach Americans about Islamic traditions and contributions.

The El-Hibri Charitable Foundation is committed to building a better world by embracing the universally shared values of Islam—peace and social justice.

corporations and health care facilities to acquaint other Americans with Islam. "We need to reach out to our neighbors," she says. Elgenaidi advises California's Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training on cultural diversity and hate crimes.

Above, journalist Fareed Zakaria is a CNN talk show host and editor-at-large for *Time* magazine. Opposite, clockwise from top right, city council member Ali Saleh stands at his campaign headquarters in Bell, California. Faiza Ali is a community organizer for the Arab American Association, Brooklyn, New York. Samier Mansur developed the law enforcement app LiveSafe and founded the Bangladesh Pluralism Project.

Muslims in American Public Life

American Muslims are increasingly active in the public square as lawyers, activists and journalists, and in law enforcement and politics. In 2006, Keith Ellison was the first American Muslim elected to the U.S. House of Representatives; he's now in his fourth term representing a Minnesota district. In 2008, another Muslim, André Carson, won a congressional seat from Indiana. Muslim congressional aides and advisers walk the halls of the Capitol Building in Washington, adding to the conversations and perspectives important in 21st century American government.

Ellison and Carson were the first to succeed in federal electoral races but they were not the first to try. One American Muslim who threw his hat in the ring was my father. It was 1992 when he made a bid for a New York Senate seat. His race was the first of its kind. With campaign funds of only $5,000, Dr. Mohammad T. Mehdi, a pioneer in Arab and American Muslim political and cultural activism, was on the ballot statewide. He won 5 percent of the vote.

> American Muslims are increasingly active in the public square as lawyers, activists and journalists, and in law enforcement and politics.

My father passed away in February 1998. He loved American football and was cheering for the Green Bay Packers in that Super Bowl so many years ago. The Packers lost that game. But my father was winning at his: seeing American Muslims thrive.

2008 Detroit's Rashida Tlaib is the first Muslim woman elected to the Michigan state legislature (left).

Keith Ellison
in his own words

> I will never forget my first run for Congress in 2006. I was a Muslim running to represent the 5th Congressional District of Minnesota in the United States House of Representatives, a district where the vast majority of people practice other faiths. If elected, I would be the first Muslim to serve in the U.S. Congress.

The people of Minneapolis and the 5th district are good and fair, but I was running for Congress only a few years after the tragedy of 9/11. The Iraq war was raging and Americans were split over whether to send more troops to the country or to withdraw and end U.S. participation in the conflict.

During the campaign, I had several conversations with local clergy of all faiths—including Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Hindu—and other community leaders.

Early in the race, I met with a local imam, and this visit was different from all the rest.

This particular imam was very influential. Though he was very well-educated, he spoke almost no English. I called the imam's office and made proper arrangements for the meeting. On the appointed day, I walked up the stairs over the prayer room of the mosque to his large office.

The sheer size of the room impressed me, along with the wood paneling and all of his volumes on various Islamic subjects.

Opposite, Congressman Keith Ellison was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006. He previously served two terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Keith Ellison
for U.S. Congress
DFL & Labor Endorsed
www.KeithEllison.org
HATCH

In America, the act of voting is the most powerful way to express your views, including dissent.

The scene was intimidating. I was about to ask this foreign-born, non-English-speaking, traditional Islamic teacher and scholar to encourage his congregation to vote.

As we sat down over tea, I wasn't sure how to broach the subject, so I just dove in.

"Imam, what do you think about voting?" I asked.

Above, left to right, Keith Ellison campaigns for Congress in 2006. Congressman Ellison speaks in favor of food benefits for low-income families. Muslim Americans vote in Brooklyn, New York.

He stroked his beard, thinking, and then said voting was problematic because he thought that the U.S. policy in Iraq was wrong. He discussed the loss of Iraqi lives and the many young American soldiers who had been killed and injured. He said the reasons for the invasion proved false, and that continued U.S. presence wasn't helping anyone. He couldn't see voting to support the war, and he didn't think he would be encouraging people in his congregation to vote.

After he finished speaking, he leaned back in his chair and sipped his tea. I leaned forward. "I agree," I said. "That's exactly why I am running for Congress. We need to get out of Iraq."

He continued his previous comments about his belief that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was a mistake. He was so focused on what he was saying that I wasn't sure he understood me.

I gently raised my hand and repeated that I agreed with him.

"You agree?!" he asked. I nodded.

"Yes, but how can you agree if the president wants the war in Iraq?"

I assured him that I agreed that the United States needed to transition out of Iraq and that's why I was running for Congress.

We began a conversation about America's representative democracy. We talked about how we needed representatives willing to stand up to the status quo. Finally he said, "In that case, I can support voting." We agreed that if a person could change society for the better, it is not merely permissible but obligatory for a Muslim to vote.

The discussion I had that day stuck with me. I will never forget how the imam explained that where he came from, only the rich and well-connected could participate in politics. Taking a public position against the president or prime minister could lead to a jail cell or worse. He described how starting a successful business in his home country might be hopeless because if you made any money, politicians would demand a piece of the profits. He said in that situation voting was simply endorsing a bad system and was likely *haram*, or disfavored in the sight of God.

But America is different.

In some countries, the act of voting is seen as an endorsement of a system that hurts people. In America, the act of voting is the most powerful way to express your views, including dissent. The imam and I talked about how people in the United States fought and died for the right to vote, and I shared the story of my grandfather, Frank Martinez, who helped organize African-American voters in the South during segregation.

A government that continues to consult the people through the democratic process of voting means there is the opportunity to make things better.

The United States is far from perfect. There are many things to fix, but five years after 9/11 the people of the 5th Congressional District of Minnesota elected a Muslim to represent them in Congress.

The imam I spoke with that day gave several sermons about the importance of voting and the duty of Muslims to use voting to improve their community.

That's why I ran for Congress in 2006 and why I believe in public service. ❧

The discussion I had that day stuck with me. The imam and I talked about the right to vote, and I shared the story of my grandfather.

Above, Congressman Ellison in his Washington office.

*profiles :

Eboo Patel
interfaith activist

> "Every country in the world is going to be more diverse 10 years from now than it is today," said Eboo Patel, founder and president of the nonprofit Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC). "The question is how are those people from different backgrounds and identities going to interact with one another?"

Patel—a Muslim born in India and raised in Chicago—hopes the answer lies in pluralism.

"Pluralism is the positive interaction of people from different backgrounds and identities within a single nation or region," he explained. Mutual respect, fostering positive relationships between people of different backgrounds, and a commitment to the common good shape Patel's pluralistic vision. To turn this vision into reality, Patel formed the IFYC in Chicago in 2002.

IFYC facilitates cooperation, particularly among young people whose ideas about the world are just beginning to take shape. College campuses shape the country's future, Patel says, because colleges train the country's future leaders.

Religious pluralism in action might be secondary school students from various faiths working together on a Habitat for Humanity home for community members in need. Such enterprises serve the community and demonstrate what can be accomplished when Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims collaborate for the common good.

"The motto of Interfaith Youth Core is 'Better together,'" Patel said. "Whatever disagreements we might have, whatever different backgrounds we might come from, we are better together. And I think, in a way, that is the motto of America."

"America is a grand gathering of souls, the vast majority from elsewhere. The American genius lies in allowing these souls to contribute their texture to the American tradition."

> Eboo Patel

Anousheh Ansari

> entrepreneur, space traveler

Before Anousheh Ansari rode a Soyuz spacecraft in 2006, becoming one of the few civilians —and the first Muslim woman—to travel in space, she was a successful entrepreneur. An Iranian immigrant to the United States, she earned a master's degree in electrical engineering at George Washington University in Washington and co-founded Telecom Technologies Inc. with her husband, Hamid, in 1993. The couple went on to found Prodea Systems, where she now serves as chief executive, near Dallas.

Her financial success allowed Ansari to fulfill her dream of space travel. Facilitated by Space Adventures Ltd., she took astronaut training and boarded a Soyuz for the ride to the International Space Station.

"I hope to inspire everyone—especially young people, women and young girls all over the world," she told Space.com in an interview.

"I believe they can realize their dreams if they keep it in their hearts, nurture it, and look for opportunities," she told WISE Muslim Women, an organization that celebrates Muslim women leaders around the world.

The Ansaris are significant donors to the X PRIZE Foundation, which funds scientific innovation.

Farah Pandith

> senior advisor

Promoting religious and cultural diversity is a personal value for Farah Pandith, an official who served three U.S. presidential administrations. As Smith College student body president in 1989, Pandith led her fellow students in advancing tolerance in response to incidents of racism directed at African-American classmates. "Diversity," she said, "like anything worth having…requires effort."

Pandith, who was born in India and immigrated to the United States as a child, says the experience of nurturing tolerance on campus led to her government career promoting tolerance and countering extremism. As special representative to Muslim communities at the U.S. Department of State from 2009 until 2014, she joined conversations with Muslims in more than 80 countries and launched initiatives to help women and youth.

Now, as a fellow at Harvard University, Pandith seeks to offer today's youth the same venues as she found as a student to pursue respect and tolerance in their communities.

"The younger generations are the leaders of tomorrow," she says, and "every voice should be given equal dignity."

* sets her sights on the stars

Anousheh Ansari

Farah Pandith

* promotes mutual understanding and tolerance

Abdul Malik Mujahid

> founder, sound vision

Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid is a man of many titles: former chair of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago; current chair of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions; and the founder and president of Sound Vision Foundation, a leading producer of educational materials about Islam.

"Since 9/11, we have seen more of our neighbors interested in learning about Muslim neighbors," Mujahid said.

Mujahid believes non-Muslims are crucial to countering ignorance about Muslims. Sound Vision provides tools. From audio compilations of Islamic songs to posters of the Kaaba, Sound Vision's offerings make Islam accessible to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. One of the foundation's most popular products is a nightly public affairs program called *Radio Islam*, which Mujahid often hosts. He is the talk show's executive producer.

"We're talking about everything concerning people in Chicago and in America, except that the hosts are Muslims," Mujahid said. Topics are of general interest: local and national issues, health and family, the arts, religion, politics and civic life. Interfaith achievements are important to Mujahid. "There are things changed in society because Muslims and their neighbors develop common causes," Mujahid said.

For his interfaith efforts, Mujahid was given a human rights award by the city of Chicago in 2007.

* gets the word out on Radio Islam

Abdul Malik Mujahid

Maryam Eskandari

> architect

Founder and CEO of MIIM Designs, architect Maryam Eskandari is in the vanguard of American mosque design, creating sacred spaces that reflect contemporary needs.

"We should start creating mosques and Islamic centers that are architecturally responsible and meeting the demands and needs of the American community," she told *Illume* magazine.

Her goal is to design "pluralistic architecture" that is inclusive of interfaith activities and built with environmentally sustainable materials. A graduate of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she has won numerous awards. An Aga Khan travel grant helped fund her research on gender issues in architecture, particularly women's spaces in contemporary mosques.

Eskandari's study of American mosque architecture resulted in a traveling photographic exhibition, *Sacred Space: (Re) Constructing the Place of Gender in the Space of Religion*. Her residential, public and commercial projects range from a private prayer space in Baltimore to a secondary school campus and a community college fine arts building in Arizona.

Maryam Eskandari

* designs contemporary eco-friendly mosques

Linda Sarsour

community activist

> "Islam plays a big role in my life and in the work that I do and the way that I carry myself. I serve community members every day, many of them from the Middle East and South Asia," says Linda Sarsour, a native New Yorker of Palestinian heritage.

As executive director of the Arab American Association of New York, Sarsour advocates for minority rights, education and civic involvement. She values collaboration with other groups and cites a "shining" example, the campaign to incorporate Muslim school holidays into the public school calendar. Jewish, Christian, Sikh and other community leaders participated in that successful effort.

The many languages spoken in her Brooklyn neighborhood, the Middle Eastern grocery stores and the American Muslim–owned businesses make Sarsour "proud to live in a country that supports and embraces people from different cultures."

"For me being an American is a privilege, and it's because I have rights here to stand up for what I believe in," she says. "I believe that the most patriotic of Americans are those that stand up to injustice even when that includes an injustice that they see their government committing."

U.S. diversity ensures an open society, Sarsour says. "Being an American and being Muslim for me is the same thing, because there is no definition of an American or what an American is supposed to be." Sarsour says Islam "empowers me as a woman to be educated, to be fearless, and to treat people with compassion and expect the same treatment back."

"Being an American Muslim is being born and raised in Brooklyn…being a mom, being someone who serves my community."

> Linda Sarsour

Opposite, below, a Ramadan poster in an Oak Lawn, Illinois, school hallway.

Ramadan

Barry Danielian

jazz musician

Versatile jazz trumpeter Barry Danielian works across genres. He has performed with jazz greats such as Dizzy Gillespie, Tito Puente, McCoy Tyner and Branford Marsalis; rockers Bruce Springsteen—with whom he has toured since 2012—Paul Simon, Sting, Bono and Elton John; rhythm and blues legends including Ray Charles, the Temptations and the Four Tops; and pop vocalists Barbra Streisand, Tony Bennett and Celine Dion, among many others.

He played in the horn band Tower of Power in the 1990s and has released two CDs as a solo artist. Besides being in demand as a session player, Danielian is a composer, an arranger and a producer. A YouTube mentor for aspiring horn players, he teaches techniques like "How to Play High Notes on the Trumpet!" for the Trumpet Workshop on StudyMusicOnline.

Danielian, a Muslim convert, told writer Jonathan Curiel that the music he plays onstage connects to the religious chants at his New Jersey mosque. "In my congregation," Danielian said, "when we get together, especially when the shaykhs come and there are hundreds of people and we do the litanies, they're very musical. You hear what we as Americans would call soulfulness or blues. That's definitely in there."

"Man's role is as the khalifah or caretaker of Creation. We are taught to live in harmony within Creation."

> Barry Danielian

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Want to know more?

the contributors :

Shahed Amanullah is CEO and co-founder of LaunchPosse, which helps aspiring entrepreneurs harness social networking, and CEO and co-founder of Halalfire, which informs global Muslim communities online. He was formerly senior technology adviser at the U.S. State Department. He created the global halal restaurant guide Zabihah.com and Altmuslim.net.

Anisa Mehdi is an Emmy Award–winning broadcast journalist and writer specializing in religion and the arts. Her documentary films have appeared on PBS, ABC and National Geographic Television, and she is currently working on her third film on the hajj. She also plays the flute.

Mas'ood Cajee lives in California. His essays and articles have appeared in various American magazines and anthologies, and websites such as Altmuslim, Beliefnet, *Fellowship* magazine and *Turning Wheel*.

Cihan Kaan is a writer, lecturer and film producer. His book *Halal Pork and Other Stories* was published in 2011. He writes for numerous online and print publications. He resides in Venice, California, where he is a branding experience designer and consultant through his company Protoactive. He is committed to furthering interfaith understanding.

G. Willow Wilson, a Muslim convert, is the Eisner Award-nominated author of *The Butterfly Mosque*, *Cairo: A Graphic Novel* and the comic book series *Air*. Her latest novel is *Alif the Unseen*. She is the scriptwriter for the new Marvel Comics series that features Kamala Khan, a Pakistani-American Muslim teenage girl superhero from Jersey City.

Samier Mansur is the founder of LiveSafe, a mobile app and law enforcement dashboard used as a tool for community safety. He is also the founder and director of the Bangladesh Pluralism Project, which supports civil society and global engagement in Bangladesh.

Precious Rasheeda Muhammad is an author, award-winning speaker, historian, poetess, publisher, and Harvard-trained researcher who educates people with diverse racial, religious and socio-economic backgrounds about Islam in America. She is dedicated to "building community through history."

Dalia Mogahed is president and chief executive officer of Mogahed Consulting and a former executive director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies. She is co-author with John L. Esposito of *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. President Obama appointed Mogahed to the White House Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in 2009.

Keith Ellison has represented the 5th Congressional District of Minnesota in the U.S. House of Representatives since taking office on January 4, 2007. This vibrant and ethnically diverse district includes the city of Minneapolis and the surrounding suburbs.

Rami Nashashibi is executive director of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network and assistant professor of the sociology of religion and Muslim studies at the Chicago Theological Seminary. He is a recipient of several prestigious awards for his work. He was named one of the "500 Most Influential Muslims in the World" by The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre in Jordan and a White House "Champion of Change" in 2011.

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Video, Music, People

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Barry Danielian
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Anisa Mehdi
Abdul Malik Mujahid, Radio Islam: Daily Muslim Talk Radio Chicago
Precious Rasheeda Muhammad

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Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN)
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Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project

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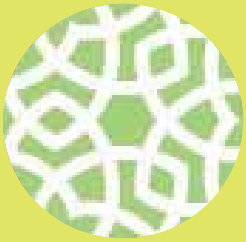

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