

African Americans and Religion

Focus: A Minority within a Minority: Black Muslims

SECTION ONE

African Muslims in Early America

By Ayla Amon, *The Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture*, Washington, DC

SOURCE: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/collection/african-muslims-early-america>

Islam has been a piece of the American religious fabric since the first settlers arrived in North America.

While we do not know exactly how many African Muslims were enslaved and transported to the New World, there are clues in legal doctrines, slaveholders' documents, and existing cultural and religious traditions. African Muslims were caught in the middle of complicated social and legal attitudes from the very moment they landed on our Eastern shores, and collections at the Museum help provide insight into their lives.

"I knew several [people] who must have been, from what I have since learned, Mohamedans [Muslims]; though at that time, I had never heard of the religion of Mohamed. There was one man on this plantation... who prayed five times every day, always turning his face to the east, when in the performance of his devotion." *Charles Ball, 1837*

African Muslims were an integral part of creating America from mapping its borders to fighting against British rule. Muslims first came to North America in the 1500s as part of colonial expeditions. One of these explorers was a man named Mustafa Zemmouri, also known as Estevanico, who was sold by the Portuguese into slavery in 1522. While enslaved by Spanish conquistador Andrés Dorantes de Carranza, Estevanico became one of the first Africans to set foot on the North American continent. He explored Florida and the Gulf Coast, eventually traveling as far west as New Mexico.

African Muslims also fought alongside colonists during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). Multiple men with Muslim names appear on the military muster rolls, including Bampett Muhamed, Yusuf ben Ali (also known as Joseph Benhaley), and Joseph Saba. Other men listed on muster rolls have names that are likely connected to Islamic practice, such as Salem Poor and Peter Salem, whose names may reflect a form of the Arabic *salaam*, meaning peace. These men often distinguished themselves on the battlefield.

The founding fathers were aware of Islam and the presence of Muslims in America. Thomas Jefferson, who owned a copy of the Qur'an, included Islam in many of his early writings and political treatises. Campaigning for religious freedom in Virginia, Jefferson argued in the proposed "Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom" that, "neither Pagan nor Mahamedan [Muslim] nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the Commonwealth because of his religion." Unfortunately, this language was amended before ratification to remove references to non-Christian groups. Jefferson was not the only statesman who recognized religions other than Christianity in his work. However, their knowledge of and theoretical openness to Islam did not stop them from enslaving African Muslims.

“True freedom embraces the Mahomitan [Muslim] and the Gentoo [Hindu] as well as the Christian religion.” *Richard Henry Lee, Letter to James Madison 1784*

[...]

Muslims also used literacy to leverage their freedom through their labor. Slave owners exploited Muslims’ ability to read and write, as well as their professional backgrounds. So enslaved Muslims used jobs such as bookkeepers, personal servants, and coachmen to gain physical mobility, learn American business practices, and access information normally only shared within white society. Yarrow Mamout of Georgetown, Washington, D.C., was one such example. Mamout, enslaved by the Beall family, was known as a jack of all trades: he made charcoal, worked on the ship *Maryland*, weaved baskets, and made bricks. He was able to earn his own money from these endeavors, and a brick-making agreement with Beall’s wife eventually led to his manumission in April 1807. After 44 years enslaved, Mamout became an entrepreneur, bank investor, and homeowner in Georgetown, where he would walk the streets singing the praises of Allah.

“Yarrow owns a House & lotts and is known by most of the Inhabitants of Georgetown... he professes to be a mahometan [Muslim], and is often seen & heard in the Streets singing Praises to God.” *Charles Willson Peale 1818*

However, Muslims also experienced open hostility and hardship when practicing their faith. Ayuba Suleiman Diallo was pelted with dirt by a white boy in Kent Island, Maryland, as he prayed; others were forced to wear sacrilegious clothing, ignore dietary rules and religious fasting, or abstain from the required prayers. An unnamed “Moorish slave” in Louisiana confirmed this hardship in 1822 when he “lamented... that his situation as a slave in America, prevents him from obeying the dictates of his religion.” Nevertheless, they persevered and lived their faith. Many became pseudo-converts to Christianity (called *taqiyyah*) to protect themselves and their families and they had to hide their true beliefs. Lamine Kebe pretended to convert to Christianity in order to secure passage back to Africa through the American Colonization Society. However, after returning to Africa, Kebe disappeared into Sierra Leone, surely “still retaining his Mohammedan creed.” Others, like Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, refused to budge in their faith and were rewarded for it. His faith impressed his slave owner so much that he was freed and provided passage back to Africa, receiving a royal welcome in England on the way.

[...]

Enslaved Muslims were brought to the United States with distinct cultural and religious beliefs. They succeeded in forming networks and communities, and they maintained their religious identity despite overwhelming odds. The material culture Muslims left behind—books, writings, clothing, beads, and rugs—help tell their stories today. As Katie Brown, great-granddaughter of Bilali Mohammad, recalls, these objects were an integral part of their religious practice and identity.

Islam has always been an important religion in America and the National Museum of African American History and Culture is building a collection that honors how the call to prayer has been sounding for more than 500 years.

Resources

Interested in learning more about the history of African Muslims in the United States? See Sylviane Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (NYU Press, 2013); and Allan Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles* (Routledge, 2011). You can also find the [WPA Interviews](#) at the Library of Congress.

For short audio stories about the history of African American Muslims, see NPR’s “[A History of Black Muslims in America](#)” (August 23, 2005); Backstory with the American History Guys’ “[Writing on the Wall: the Story of Omar ibn Said](#)” (October 29, 2014); and The Rise of Charm City’s “[Can’t We All Just Get Islam?](#)” (July 22, 2016).

Want to learn more about the Qu’ran? View this [digital copy](#) hosted by the University of Michigan.

Other institutions with collections related to African Muslims in America include [America's Islamic Heritage Museum](#) in Washington, D.C. and the [Islamic Society of Baltimore](#) in Catonsville, MD. If you would like to learn more about Islam in Africa, visit the Smithsonian's [National Museum of African Art](#) in Washington, D.C.

SECTION TWO

African-American Islam Reformed: “Black Muslims” and the Universal Ummah

Pluralism Project, Harvard University

SOURCE: <http://pluralism.org/religions/islam/islam-in-america/african-american-islam-reformed-black-muslims-and-the-universal-ummah/>

African Americans make up some 40 percent of the total Muslim population of the United States today. The term “Black Muslims,” coined by Dr. C. Eric Lincoln in 1956 to refer specifically to the Nation of Islam, is a label that today blurs the complex picture of Muslim groups in this community. Most African-American Muslims now identify themselves with the worldwide Muslim *ummah*, adopting the beliefs and practices of “mainstream” Islam, whether as Sunni Muslims, Shi’i Muslims, or, if they reject such distinctions altogether, as “Muslim Americans.” The indigenous history of Islam is a fascinating, complex, and uniquely American story.

In the mid-1960s, Malcolm X broke ties with the Nation of Islam when he became dissatisfied with its leadership and non-Islamic teachings. Then in 1975, W. Deen Mohammed succeeded his deceased father, Elijah Muhammad, as leader of the Nation. W. Deen Mohammed began a rapid transformation toward more orthodox Islam, beginning with the assertion of *tauhid*. He explained the “strange teachings” of his father as necessary for building the dignity and identity of African Americans, preparing the way for them to embrace true Islam. He renamed the group the World Community of Al-Islam in the West and then the American Muslim Mission. Imam Mohammed courted the world Muslim community, urging other African-American Muslim leaders to gain greater Islamic education and to work toward interracial and interreligious cooperation.

Many Muslims formerly affiliated with the Nation of Islam describe the first years after the death of Elijah Muhammad as the “transition” to Islam: “temples” became mosques, or *masajid*; racial barriers were destroyed; and the practices of the global Muslim community were introduced. Today, some twenty years after the transition, the Ministry of Imam W. Deen Mohammed publishes the weekly *Muslim Journal*, broadcasts weekly radio and television shows, runs over twenty full-time Clara Muhammad Schools, and has affiliated *masajid* in over 100 cities. The vast majority of the Nation’s membership followed this transition, and today, over 2,000,000 African Americans are now part of the worldwide Muslim *ummah*.

Certain African-American sectarian groups continue to draw supporters, although some of the views advocated by these groups are regarded by most Muslims as heretical, or at the very least non-Islamic; other Muslims see these as stepping-stones to the path of “true” Islam. In 1977, Minister Louis Farrakhan revived the old Nation of Islam, restoring its organization and the University of Islam in Chicago. He claims that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad commanded him to continue leading the chosen black race to liberation from slavery. The Nation of Islam, with over sixty affiliated mosques and perhaps as many as 20,000 members, has successfully organized a security company, continues to support black business enterprise and drug-free neighborhoods, and publishes the *Final Call*

newspaper. Although maintaining the Nation of Islam's doctrine and ideology, in recent years some members have begun to pray traditional Muslim prayers and to fast during the month of Ramadan, in addition to the Nation's December fast.

[...]

The unity of these movements depended primarily on the strength of their leaders, including the men mentioned above, and after their deaths, many of these communities disbanded, including the Dar ul-Islam movement, W. Deen Mohammed's American Society of Muslims, and adherents of Imam Jamil Al-Amin. The Nation of Islam, re-established under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan, continued to grow in strength, but today, the influence of Arab, South Asian, and Southeast Asian Muslim immigrants has made a significant impact on the state of African-American Islam, as American Muslims from all backgrounds have been united by efforts to challenge religious persecution and mainstream distrust in the wake of 9/11.

Through the early years of the twenty-first century, African-American Islam continued to have its own face, through the work of such organizations as MANA, the *Muslim Alliance in North America*, and *Project Downtown*. MANA aims to unite Muslim organizations in North America, particularly those of "indigenous Muslims," i.e. African-American Muslims, in order to address issues and concerns—social, economic, and religious—that are specific to that community, as well as those that affect American society in general. Project Downtown, which was started by Muslim university students in Miami, Florida, aims to provide food and conversation to the homeless, welcoming people of all faiths to participate as volunteers. The organization emphasizes that it acts in the charitable spirit of Islam, providing help to those who need it, regardless of their faith, and doing so without preaching or otherwise extending an explicit invitation to Islam. These organizations are changing and strengthening the African-American Muslim community, providing an example of what might continue to evolve out of this faith tradition in the American context.

SECTION THREE

Muslim Americans Are United by Trump—and Divided by Race

Emma Green March 11, 2017

SOURCE: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/muslim-americans-race/519282/>

Facing increasing hostility from the administration, the religious community also has to cope with its own internal tensions.

When weary Muslims gathered in Toronto in December [2016] for an annual retreat, marking the end of a tumultuous U.S. election year, they probably didn't expect the event to turn into a referendum on racial tensions within the American Muslim community. But it did.

[...]

Even though slightly less than one-third of American Muslims are black, [according](#) to Pew Research Center, American Muslims are most often represented in the media as Arab or South Asian immigrants. The distinction between the African-American Muslim experience and that of their immigrant co-religionists has long been a source of racial tension in the Muslim community, but since the election, things have gotten both better and worse. While some Muslims seem to be paying more attention to racism because of Donald Trump, others fear that any sign of internal division is dangerous for Muslims in a time of increased hostility.

While the Toronto conference was upsetting, Evans said, he doesn't think it's representative of the biggest racial problems in the American Muslim community. White racism toward black people is "not the kind of racism that circumscribes my life as an American Muslim," he told me. "It's the social racism I experience from people of Arab descent, of Southeast Asian descent. This is the racism no one is talking about."

[...]

Some Muslims say "we shouldn't talk about anti-blackness within the community, because we're under siege by Islamophobes."

"Immigrant Muslims had a convenient comfort zone," said Omar Suleiman, an imam based in Dallas who serves as president of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research. As each new immigrant community established its own mosques and community centers, portions of the Muslim American population became segregated by ethnicity and income. For non-black Muslims who grew up in the suburbs, attended private schools, and rarely encountered black Muslims in their mosques, it's easy "to internalize many of the poisonous notions about the black community that ... diminish the pain of those communities," he said.

"I think a lot of African American Muslims see a hypocrisy sometimes with immigrant Muslims," said Saba Maroof, a Muslim psychiatrist with a South Asian background who lives in Michigan. "We say that Muslims are all equal in the eyes of God, that racism doesn't exist in Islam." And yet, cases of overt racism aren't uncommon, like when South Asian or Arab immigrant parents don't want their kids to marry black Muslims. "That happened in my family," she said.

[...]

Some Muslims believe "we shouldn't talk about anti-blackness within the community, because we're under siege by Islamophobes. This is not the right time to air internal laundry," Rashad said. But "if I have to contend with anti-Muslim bigotry outside of the Muslim community, and within my own community, I'm having to push back on anti-black racism, I'm kind of fighting a war on two fronts."

Racial dynamics have long shaped Muslims' political identities. There's a "tendency to regard issues that impact black people—and by extension, black Muslims—as not thoroughly Islamic," said Evans. "If we're talking about a social issue in Palestine or Chechnya or Kashmir or Saudi Arabia or anywhere else, those things can properly be engaged as 'Islamic issues.' [If] we're talk about economic injustice, or gentrification, or ex-offender re-entry, or recidivism, those things aren't really regarded as 'legitimately Islamic.' It's like, 'Why would a Muslim of conscience be talking about that stuff?'"

Media outlets typically go for "people who are ethnic, but not too much."

As Muslim leaders have taken up visible roles in anti-Trump activism, these dynamics have intensified. Progressive leaders have condemned the so-called Muslim ban—the executive order that originally affected people from seven Muslim-majority countries—putting the focus in the Muslim community on immigration. But when protesters swarmed airports in large American cities following the order's release, some black Muslims stayed home, said Margari Hill, the co-founder of the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative, who is also a black Muslim. "They have this long-term struggle. Not much has changed—it's always been kind of terrible," she said. And "when it comes to the spectacle of black death, we don't necessarily see a lot of Middle Eastern or South Asian Muslims showing up for Black Lives Matter."

[...]



Related Story:
[Are Jews White?](#)

There's also debate within the community on the right way for Muslims to show their patriotism. The red, white, and blue hijabi was [a visible symbol](#) in the Women's March on Washington in January, but not all Muslims think that image sends the right kind of message about the religion. "It feels like a performance," said Rashad. "As a black American, I am fully cognizant of the fact that that kind of performance does not lead to equality." While Muslim immigrants have often viewed America as a meritocracy, she said, "For black Muslims, our history is complicated. This hasn't been a place of opportunity or meritocracy." "Nobody wants to be known as a racist."

[...]

Meanwhile, some black Muslims are having a political awakening of their own on issues like immigration. "There wasn't as much outrage with the Obama administration," said Hill. Obama used less inflammatory rhetoric to talk about immigration, but his administration [still removed a record-number](#) of undocumented immigrants from the United States. "Things that were invisible to many of us who have privilege as non-immigrants—now we see it," she said.

The irony of Islamophobia is that it may eventually produce the exact cultural effect Islamophobes fear: Muslim Americans may find a newly consolidated sense of identity and unity because of their religious affiliation. If some Muslims once hoped to be fully assimilated into elite American culture—to live in nice neighborhoods, attend fancy schools, and fully blend in with white America—that's likely impossible now, Evans said. "The first blow to that aspiration was 9/11. Then ISIS happened. The prospect began to look even farther off," he said. "With the Trump election, I really think it was finished off. It's over now."

SECTION FOUR

Homeland Security Official Resigns Over Remarks on African-Americans and Muslims

By Emily Cochrane Nov. 16, 2017

SOURCE: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/16/us/politics/homeland-security-resignation-remarks.html>

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security's head of outreach to religious and community organizations resigned on Thursday after audio recordings revealed that he had previously made incendiary remarks about African-Americans and Muslims while speaking on radio shows.

In a 2008 clip, the Rev. Jamie Johnson, who was appointed by the Trump administration to lead the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, [told radio listeners](#) that the black community had "turned America's major cities into slums because of laziness, drug use and sexual promiscuity." He also said black people were anti-Semitic because they were jealous of Jewish people, according to audio [posted](#) by CNN.

[...]

In additional audio clips individually recorded between 2011 and 2016, Mr. Johnson attacked Islam, saying on the “Mickelson in the Morning” radio show and other programs that “[Muslims want to cut our heads off](#),” that Islam is “[an ideology posing as a religion](#)” and that President George W. Bush made a mistake by [calling it a religion of peace](#).

[In another audio clip](#), Mr. Johnson also said he agreed with the conservative author Dinesh D’Souza that “all that Islam has ever given us is oil and dead bodies over the last millennia and a half.”

[...]

“The DHS Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships is driven by one simple, enduring, inspirational principle,” Mr. Johnson [wrote on his account’s inaugural post](#) eight months ago. “LOVE THY NEIGHBOR.”

SECTION FIVE

The Great East-to-West Diffusion

SOURCE: Instructor’s Notes: The Course Glossary

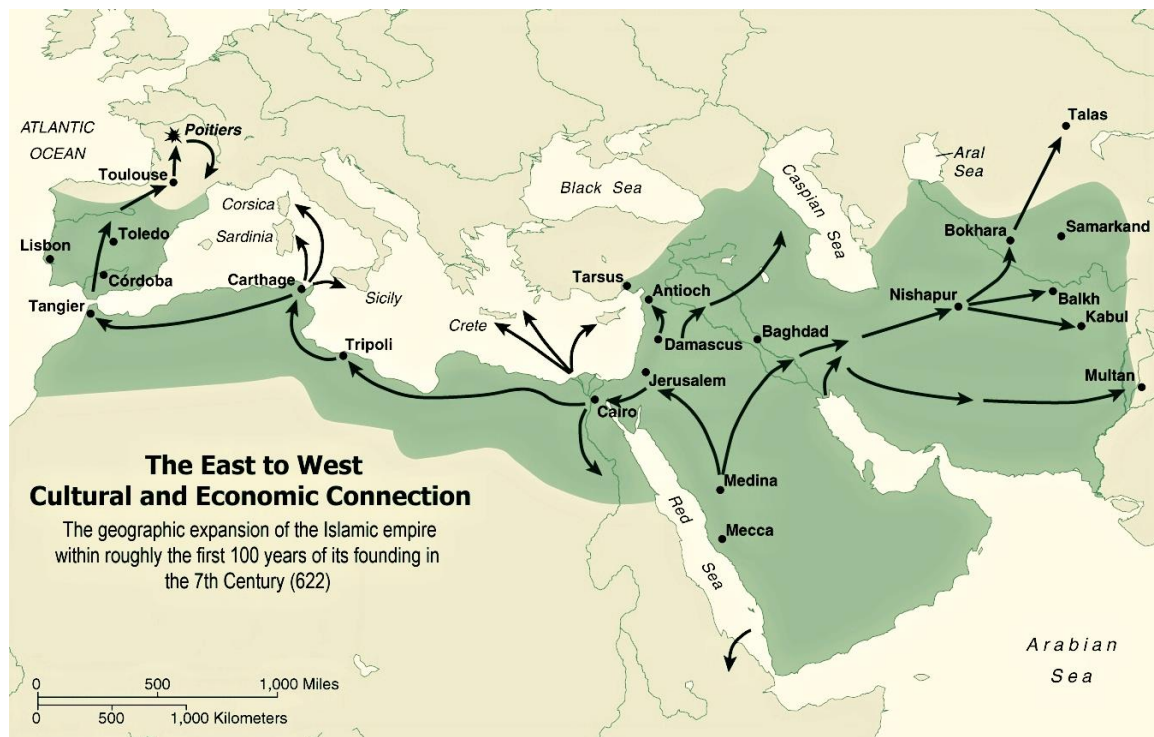
<https://sites.google.com/site/courseglossary/the-great-east-to-west-diffusion>

Folks, the insidiousness of racism, both as behavioral/institutional practice and as an ideology, is that it can virulently infect so many different areas of society (politics, economics, law, religion, education, science, etc.). One very important arena is “knowledge production” where the objective of the racist is to de-legitimate any knowledge—no matter the depth of its veracity—that does not validate his/her racist ignorant view of the world. Given the resurgence in recent years of an obsession with [Islamophobia](#) among principally large sections of the white populace in Western countries (joined by others in places like China, India, and Russia), it is not surprising that a big item on the agenda of the Euro-racist nutjobs is not only the de-legitimation of Islam as a religion—bizarrely referring to it as mere political ideology—but the place of the Islamic civilization in world history; that is a civilization that in geographic magnitude once stretched from China to France. Therefore, what follows is a description of one very important role played by the Islamic civilization from the perspective of world history—as a response, in the name of *knowledge* (in contrast to its opposite, *superstition*, that is so often peddled by racists), to this Euro-racist agenda. As a scholar of world history, and a self-labeled iconoclast, I feel mandated to undertake this task. Now, the particular role I have in mind here is the critical part played by Islam in a transnational phenomenon that transcended both time and space and which would help lay the foundations of the so-called “European Renaissance,” but which in its origins predated Islam’s arrival on the world stage: what I refer to as the “Great East-to-West Diffusion.”

At the simplest level, I use the phrase the “Great East-to-West Diffusion,” to refer to the transmission from the East to the **West** over a period of several thousand years (roughly from the beginning of the Egyptians and Mesopotamian civilizations around 3500 BCE to the consummation of the **Columbian Project** with the inauguration of the European sea routes connecting all parts of the planet, which occurs by around 1700 CE) of ideas, products, and technologies through trade, war, conquest, etc. across both space and time. Although it may initially appear to be a term analogous to the **Columbian Exchange** there are two fundamental and important differences between the two processes of **globalization** to which these two terms ultimately refer: first, the Great East-to-West Diffusion was, for the most part, a unidirectional phenomenon as the term so evidently makes it clear, and, second, unlike in the case of the Columbian Exchange, it is a deliberately politically loaded term. That is, in coming up with this phrase (Great East-to-West Diffusion), my concern is to restore to universal memory the historical truth that many of the roots of the so-called “Western Civilization” are to be found in the East, broadly understood to include the entire Afro-Asian ecumene. Why is this so important? Well, for one it speaks to truth (as in do not tell lies by fabricating history) which is one of the foundational purposes of all true education.

The second reason is that ever since the emergence of Western global hegemony in the aftermath of the Columbian Project, Western historians of world history have seen their role—for the most part—to advance, in various guises, sometimes overt and sometimes covert, the fallacious notion of “European exceptionalism” (meaning Europeans, compared to others on this planet, have been genetically endowed with superior intelligence) to explain this hegemony, which if not racist in intent at least borders on it.

To know about the East-to-West Diffusion and to make it central to the study of world history is to help counter what I call civilizational **hubris** (and which in turn would help to foster humility and gratitude, two of the several human attributes that are foundational to harmony between peoples). So, from the perspective of true education, to establish, for example, who were the first this and first that (astronomers, inventors, scientists, mathematicians, etc.) would be simply a question of learning facts and no more. It would not be, as it has usually been in the study and teaching of world history by Western historians, an effort to deny the commonality of all humanity in which every ethnic variation of humankind has made some contribution at some point (even if only at the most rudimentary level of domestication of plant and/or animal life) to the totality of the modern human cultural development and experience. (See the fascinating study by Weatherford [1988], with respect to the last point.) As Joseph Needham (1954: 9) sagely observed in volume 1 of his work: “Certain it is that no people or group of peoples has had a monopoly in contributing to the development of science.” For all its proclamation of the virtues of “civilization” (to be understood here in its normative sense) the denial of this fact has been, sadly, as much a project of the West as its other, laudable, endeavors—for reasons that, of course, one does not have to be a rocket scientist to fathom: domination of the planet under the aegis of various forms of imperialism (an endeavor that, even now in the twenty-first century, most regrettably, has yet to see its demise).



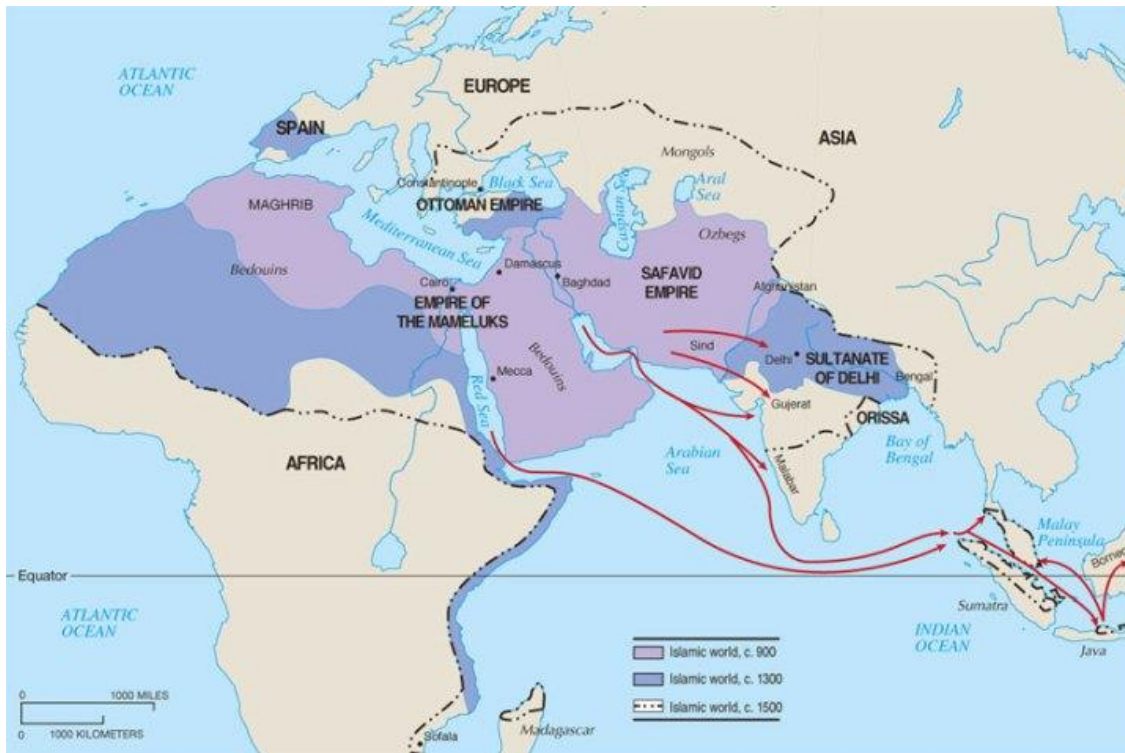
Consequently, under these circumstances, true history is burdened by the need for constant vigilance against this Western intellectual tradition of *erasure* of universal historical memory for the purposes of rendering irrelevant the contributions of others.¹ Moreover, one must be cognizant of the fact that it is a tradition that relies on a number of techniques: the most direct of which is “scholarly silence”—

where there is a complete (or almost complete) absence of any recognition of a contribution. However, given the obvious transparency of this technique, it has increasingly been replaced by one that is more subtle (hence of greater intractability): achieving erasure not by a total lack of acknowledgement, but by the method of *token* (and sometimes even derisory) acknowledgement where the object of the erasure is mentioned in passing and then promptly dismissed from further consideration despite its continuing relevance to the subject at hand. As an extension of this last point, it is questionable to talk about a Western civilization at all; so much of its inheritance is from outside Europe—a more fitting term perhaps

1. Consider, for example, the long line of Western science historians who have grappled with the issue of the origins of Europe's scientific revolution and who feature in Cohen's overview of their work (1994) but yet almost none of them deigned to even nod at the precursory presence of Islamic science.

would be Afro-Eurasian civilization. To the **ignorantsia**, who are heirs to a Western ethnocentric mind-set honed over a period of some 600 years, of seeing humankind in no other terms than a color-coded hierarchical cultural fragmentation, this new appellation may, at first blush, appear hysterically preposterous; yet, in actuality, there is a growing body of literature that cogently demonstrates that the so-called Western civilization is simply a developmental extension of Afro-Asian civilizations. After all, if one were to take the entire 5,000-year period of recorded human history, commencing from say approximately thirtieth-century B.C.E. to the present twenty-first-century C.E., the European civilizational imprint, from a global perspective, becomes simply an *atomized* blip (the *notion* of an unbroken path going from the Greeks to the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution, is just that, an illusory fabrication), and what is more, geographically, demographically, and culturally, a peripheral one at that when viewed against that of the neighboring Afro-Asian civilizations, taken together (ranging from the Sumerian to the Egyptian to the Chinese to the Islamic).² It is only in the last 300 years or so that, civilizationally, Western Europe has taken center stage. The fact that many European and U.S. historians appear to be unaware of this simple fact is testimony to the enduring Western ethnocentric teleological tunnel vision that thoroughly imbues their work. Note that Western ethnocentrism is to be understood here as an ideology that is shared by all classes of Western Europeans and their diasporic descendants that is rooted in the assumption that, to quote Harding (1993: 2), “Europe functions autonomously from other parts of the world; that Europe is its own origin, final end, and agent; and that Europe and people of European descent in the Americas and elsewhere owe nothing to the rest of the world.” See also Amin (1989) and Blaut (1993, 2000), for a brilliant, but scathing critique of the Western ethnocentric paradigm that undergirds much of Western historiography.

The geography of Islam a thousand years after its founding



Yet, consider that if one were to turn one's historical gaze back to as recently as the beginning of the eighth-century when the Muslims (sometimes referred to as Moors by Western historians) arrived in Europe one has no difficulty whatsoever in categorically stating that there was nothing that one could read in the entrails of Europe then—comparatively backward as it was in almost all ways—that pointed to anything that could predict its

eventual rise to global hegemony. What is more, even after fast forwarding 700 years, to arrive in the fifteenth-century, a different reading would still not have been forthcoming. In other words, folks, after you have ploughed through this definition there should be no difficulty in accepting the fact that at the point in time when Columbus left Europe in what would eventually prove to be a portentous journey for the entire planet, the cultures of many developing *parts* of the Afro-

2. Consider what Hodgson says in Volume 1 of his work on the matter of the geographic peripherality of Western Europe: “[T]he artificial elevation of the European peninsula to the status of a continent, equal in dignity to the rest of Eurasia combined, serves to reinforce the natural notion shared by Europeans and their overseas descendants, that they have formed at least half of the main theater (Eurasia) of world history, and, of course, the more significant half. Only on the basis of such categorization has it been possible to maintain for so long among Westerners the illusion that the ‘mainstream’ of world history ran through Europe” (p. 49).

Eurasian ecumene outside the European peninsula were *no less* rational, achievement-oriented, materialistic, predatory, belligerent, ambitious, scientific, capitalistic, technologically innovative, urbanized, capable of ocean navigation, and so on, than were the cultures of developing *parts* of Europe of the period (nor should it be difficult to accept that the opposites of these qualities, for that matter, existed at comparable levels of magnitude in both areas of the world). In fact, on the contrary, in some respects they were more advanced than those of Europe.

Now, of course, it is true that when one considers where Europe was some 700 years earlier (at the time of the Islamic invasion), the rapidity of the European cultural advance is nothing short of miraculous! No, this is not in the least a hint, even remotely, of the much-vaunted but illusory “European miracle.” Because this progress was not achieved by the Europeans autarkically; they did not do it alone (on the basis of their own intellectual uniqueness, inventiveness, rationality, etc.) that the Eurocentrists are so fond of arguing. Rather, it was an outcome of nothing less than a *dialectical* interplay between European cultures and the Islamic and other cultures of the

SOME PROMINENT SCHOLARS OF THE ISLAMIC EMPIRE

This list of prominent Muslim scholars of the Islamic Empire are among those whose work helped to propel the European West toward the Renaissance. Remember, no civilization ever emerges without the contributions of others.

- ♦ **Abu Musa Jabir ibn-Hayyan** (c. 721–815, known in the Latin West as Geber), an alchemist who advocated the importance of experiments in advancing scientific knowledge. His work would be foundational to the development of the field of chemistry.
- ♦ **Musa al-Khwarazmi** (d. c. 863), his seminal contributions in mathematics helped to develop that field enormously. In fact, through his mathematical treatise, *al-Jabr wa'l-Mugabalah*, he not only gave the West the term “algebra” (Latinized shorthand of the title of his treatise), but far more significant than that, he was the conduit for the passage of arithmetic numerals from India to the West. For example, he would be responsible for the introduction to the Latin West of such key mathematical tools as the concept of “zero” (an independent Hindu/ Chinese invention in the sixth-century C.E.), and the decimal system. His other contributions included sine and cotangent tables, astronomical tables, and the cartographic concepts of latitude and longitude. Even the term algorithm comes from him, albeit unwittingly—it is the Latinized version of his name. He also produced a revised version of Ptolemy’s geography, which he called *The Face of the Earth*.
- ♦ **Abu Yusuf Ya’qub ibn Ishaq ibn al-Sabbah al-Kindi** (died c. 870) a philosopher and mathematician, his contributions included works on Hindu numerals and geometry, and physiological optics.
- ♦ **Abu Bakr Muhammed bin Zakariyya’ al-Razi** (844–926, known as Rhazes in the Latin West), a physician whose work helped to further greatly the development of clinical medicine. His work on the diseases of childhood would earn him the accolade of “Father of Pediatrics” in the West.
- ♦ **Muhammed ibn Tarkhan ubn Uzalagh al-Farabi** (c. 878–c. 950, known in the Latin West as Alfarabius), author of the *Enumeration of the Sciences*, provided an integrated approach to the sciences and reiterated the distinction between divine knowledge and human knowledge.
- ♦ **Abu Al-Husayn Ali ibn Al-Husayn Al-Masudi** (d. 957), historian and explorer who is sometimes referred to as the “Herodotus of the Arabs.” His works included the 132-chapter *The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*, an abridgement of a multidisciplinary multivolume treatise on history and scientific geography of the world.
- ♦ **Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi** (903–986), among the greatest Muslim astronomers (together with *Ibn Yunus* and *Ulegh Beg*), his contributions include a major treatise on observational astronomy titled *The Book of Fixed Stars*.
- ♦ **Abu al-Qasim Khalaf ibn al-Abbas Al-Zahrawi** (930–1013, known to the Latin West as Albucasis), a famous physician and surgeon.
- ♦ **Abu Allimacr al-Hassan ibn al-Haitham** (c. 965–1039, known in the Latin West as Alhazen). Through his works in optics and related fields, he became a major contributor to the development of the physical sciences in the Latin West. By means of his experiments with light he discovered the laws of refraction as well as the various colors that make up light. He was the first scientist to conclude that sight involved the transmission of light from the seen object to the eye, which acted as a lens.
- ♦ **Abu’ Ali Al-Husain ibn Abdallah ibn Sina** (980–1037, known in the Latin West as Avicenna), a philosopher who was among the progenitors of scholasticism in the West and whose intellectual influence would touch Western thinkers as diverse as Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Robert Grosseteste, Albertus Magnus, Duns Scotus, was a great philosopher and scientist with one of the most prolific pens of his day; among his many works, two that the West got to know well are *The Book of the Remedy* (Kitab al-Shifa)—which, according to Stanton (1990: 85) stands as the “longest encyclopedia of knowledge ever authored by a single person”—and *The Canon of Medicine*, which would remain the principal textbook par excellence on medicine in the West for many, many years.
- ♦ **Abu Raihan al-Biruni** (c. 973–1051), a natural scientist whose work helped to lay the foundations of natural sciences in the Latin West.
- ♦ **Ibn al-Zarqali** (c. 1029–c.1080, known in Latin West as Arzachel). An astronomer who was responsible, among his accomplishments, for the invention of an improved astrolabe (named saphaea Arzachelis), the editing of the planetary tables produced by astronomers such as *Ibn Said* working in Muslim Toledo that came to be called the Toledan Tables, and authorship of an introductory work on trigonometry.
- ♦ **Ghiyath al-Din Abul Fateh Omar ibn Ibrahim al-Nisaburi al-Khayyami** (1044–1123) Omar Khayyam, as he is commonly known, achieved fame in the West in the nineteenth-century primarily because of his poetry (following the English translation of the Rubaiyat by Edward Fitzgerald). Yet, he was also an accomplished mathematician and astronomer making significant contributions in the area of algebra (e.g., binomial theorem).
- ♦ **Ibn Bajjah** (c. 1095–c. 1138, known in the Latin West as Avempace). A philosopher, whose work on the theory of motion is among his many contributions.
- ♦ **Ash-Sharif al-Idrisi** (1100–1165/66?), a geographer and advisor to the Norman king of Sicily, Roger II, was the author of one of the most important medieval texts on geography titled *The Pleasure Excursion of One Who Is Eager to Traverse the Regions of the World*. He spent most of the later part of his life in the service of the Norman king who provided him with the resources necessary to undertake his scholarly pursuits, which included a number of texts that combined descriptive and astronomical geography.
- ♦ **Abu al-Walid Muhammed ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammed ibn Rushd** (1126–1198, known in the West as Averroes), considered to be among the most important commentators on Aristotelian philosophy of his time (hence he was also known by the name of the Commentator—such was his scholarly authority), would have a far-reaching influence on Western thought; in fact, so much so that it would be symbolized by the intellectual crisis that it would precipitate between the church and the academy as the former attempted to battle what it thought was the theologically corrupting influence of “Averroism” (the belief that philosophy and religion were not only compatible but that philosophy was, in a sense, religion in its purest form). Significantly, he was a great advocate of syllogism, the Aristotelian method of logic.
- ♦ **Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi)** (1201–1274), an astronomer par excellence, he would greatly influence the work of such Western astronomers as Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, and Tycho Brahe by means of his accurate astronomical tables that he and his colleagues produced at a famous observatory he helped establish at Maragha (in modern-day Iran)—under the sponsorship of the Mongols no less.

NOTE: As Manfred Ullman (1978) for example points out, in some instances—especially where the author was unknown—the translations of the Islamic scholarship arrived in Europe masquerading as scholarship authored by the translators themselves or their benefactors (rather than as translations of Islamic scholarship). In fact there appears to be some evidence that even at that time Muslims were aware of this problem: d’Alvemy (1982: 440) quotes a late eleventh-century Muslim scholar in Spain, Ibn Abdun, admonishing his fellow Muslims: “You must not sell books of science to Jews and Christians... because it happens that they translate these scientific books and attribute them to their own people and to their bishops, when they are indeed Muslim works.” In other words, even if all the translated Islamic works were available today, the fullest extent of the Islamic scientific scholarly contribution to the Latin West will never be known because of such unashamed wholesale plagiarism.

Afro-Eurasian ecumene. Hodgson, for instance, is adamant that one must cast ones historiographical gaze across the history of the *entire* ecumene, for, as he explains, “most of the more immediately formative elements that led to the Transmutation, both material and moral, had come to the Occident, earlier or later, from other regions,” (p. 197). In other words, as he puts it: “[w]ithout the cumulative history of the whole of Afro-Eurasian ecumene, of which the Occident had been an integral part, the Western Transmutation would be almost unthinkable” (p. 198). Or in the words of Frank (1998: 4): “Europe did

not pull itself up by its own economic bootstraps, and certainly not thanks to any kind of European exceptionalism of rationality, institutions, entrepreneurship, technology, geniality, in a word—of race.”

To really drive home this fundamental truth some examples may help, and here I will concentrate on the role of Islam (especially considering that it has become a favorite sport of politicians and pseudo-intellectuals alike in the West, since 9/11, to malign this religion at every opportunity in the name of the very legitimate need to severely castigate the terrorists and extremists who have hijacked this religion for their misguided and nefarious ends) in the development of Western modernity. Through the agency of Islam—involving a variety of mechanisms of diffusion, such as direct residential contacts with immigrant Muslims (e.g., in Muslim Sicily and Muslim Spain), the Arabic to Latin translation movement during the *Reconquista*, the Crusades, and long-distance trade—Europe was introduced to a range of technological artifacts and methods derived from within the Islamic empire, as well as from without (from such places as China and India). Note, however, that the concept of “technological diffusion” itself requires some analysis. As Glick’s study (1979) of Islamic Spain, for example, attests, one of the most important handmaidens of technological innovation is technological diffusion. However, one must be specific about what this concept means. It should be understood here to refer not only to the *direct* passage of artifacts and techniques from one culture to another (usually known as technology transfer), but also the *indirect* form of transmission that Pacey (1996) points to: the spread of information (actively or passively via travelers, traders, books, letters, etc.) about a given technology from one culture to another provoking an “independent” development of similar or even improved technology in the latter culture. Pacey refers to this technology as “responsive inventions.”

Further, in the category of responsive inventions one may also throw in inventions arising out of direct imitation of technological artifacts acquired through trade (for commercial purposes), or acquired through some other means (including illegal means) for the explicit purpose of local manufacture. It follows then that the concept of technological diffusion also embodies (seemingly paradoxically) the possibility of independent inventions. A good example of this that immediately comes to mind is the windmill. It has been suggested (Hill 1993: 116), that whereas in all probability the European windmill—considering its design—was independently invented sometime toward the end of the twelfth-century, the concept of using wind as an energy source may, however, have arrived in Europe through the agency of Islam (windmills—of a different design—had long been in use in the Islamic empire). Another example is the effort by Europeans to imitate the manufacture of a high-quality steel common in the Islamic empire called Damascus steel (primarily used in sword making). Even though, observes Hill (1993: 219), in the end Europeans never learned to reproduce Damascus steel, their 150-year-long effort in this direction was not entirely in vain: it provided them with a better insight into the nature of this steel, thereby allowing them to devise other methods to manufacture steel of a similar quality.

Anyhow, whatever the mode of diffusion, the truth, folks, is this: the arrival of Islamic technology and Islamic mediated technology of non-Islamic (e.g., Chinese, Indian) and pre-Islamic (e.g., Egyptian, Persian, etc.) provenance—examples would include: the abacus; the astrolabe; the compass; paper-making; the ogival arch; gun powder; specialized dam building (e.g., the use of desilting sluices, the use of hydropower, etc.); sericulture; weight-driven clocks; the traction trebuchet; specialized glass-making; sugarcane production and sugar-making; the triangular lateen sail (allowed a ship to sail into wind more efficiently than a regular square sail common on European ships); and cartographic maps (upon which the European nautical charts called *portolans* were based)—had profound catalytic consequences for Europe.³ It became the basis of European technological advancement in a number of key areas and which in turn would help to propel it on its journey toward the fateful year of 1492 and therefrom modernity.

Contemplate this: four of the most important technological advancements that would be foundationally critical to the development of a modern Europe (navigation, warfare, communication and plantation agriculture) had their roots outside Europe, that is, in the East! Reference here, is, of course, to the compass (plus other seafaring aids such as the lateen sail, etc.); gunpowder; paper-making and printing (that is, block printing and printing with movable type); and cane sugar

3. A note on the *portolans*, given their critical importance to the European sea navigators, that should further give pose to those who continue to insist on European exceptionalism: while the immediate provenance of many of them was Islamic, the Muslims themselves were also indebted for some of their maps to the Chinese. Of singular importance are those that were of relevance to the European Atlantic voyages given that the Chinese had, probably, already preceded Columbus to the Americas—vide for example the voyage of Zhou Wen described by Menzies (2003). (Note: Menzies also discusses the Chinese contribution to the development of the *portolans*.)

production. All four technologies first originated in the East and then slowly found their way to the West through the mediation of the Muslims.⁴ Along the way, of course, the Muslims improved on them. Now, it is true that Europe's ability to absorb these technologies was a function of internal developments, some unique to itself. As Pacey (1996: 44) observes: "if we see the use of nonhuman energy as crucial to technological development, Europe in 1150 was the equal of Islamic and Chinese civilizations." But, as he continues, the key point here is this: "In terms of the sophistication of individual machines, however, notably for textile processing, and in terms of the broad scope of its knowledge, Europe was still a backward region, which stood to benefit much from its contacts with Islam."

Islam introduced Europe to international commerce on a scale it had never experienced before. The characterization by Watt (1972: 15) that "Islam was first and foremost a religion of traders, not a religion of the desert and not a religion of peasants," is very close to the truth. Not surprisingly, then, the twin factors of geographic breadth of the Islamic empire (which included regions with long traditions of commerce going back to antiquity, such as the Mediterranean Basin) and the acceptance of commerce as a legitimate occupational endeavor for Muslims—one that had been pursued by no less than Prophet Muhammed himself—had created a vast and truly global long-distance trade unmatched by any civilization hitherto. In fact, the reach of the Islamic dominated commercial network was such that it would embrace points as far apart as China and Italy on the east-west axis and Scandinavia and the deepest African hinterland on the north-south axis, with the result that the tonnage and variety of cargo carried by this network went far beyond that witnessed by even Greece and Rome in their heyday (Turner 1995: 117). Al-Hassan and Hill (1986: 18) remind us that the discovery of thousands upon thousands of Islamic coins dating from the seventh to thirteenth centuries in Scandinavia and the Volga basin region highlights the fact that for many centuries Europe relied on Islamic currency for its commercial activities, such was the domination of international trade by the Muslims (see also Watson 1995 for more on the East-West numismatic relations).

Consider the list of luxury and other commodities that Europe received from the East (including Africa) through the agency of the Muslim merchants: coffee; cotton textiles (a luxury commodity in Europe prior to the industrial revolution); fruits and vegetables of the type that medieval Europe had never known (e.g., almonds, apricots, bananas, eggplants, figs, lemons, mangoes, oranges, peaches); gold; ivory; paper; tulips; porcelain; rice; silks; spices (these were especially important in long-distance trade and they included cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, ginger, nutmeg, pepper, saffron, and turmeric); alum; dyes and dye-making products; medicinal drugs; aromatics (e.g., frankincense, myrrh, musk); cane sugar and sugarcane; and so on. (The last is of special historical significance, sadly, considering the ignominious role it would play in the genesis of the Atlantic slave trade.) What is more, with the exception of a few items such as gold, silk, some aromatics, and a few spices like cinnamon and saffron, medieval Europe had not even known of the existence of most of these products prior to the arrival of Islam.

In other words, the Islamic civilization, through its commercial network, introduced Europe, often for the first time, to a wide range of Eastern consumer products (the variety and quantity of which was further magnified via the agency of the Crusades) that whet the appetite of the Europeans for more—not surprisingly, they felt compelled to undertake their *voyages of exploitation, à la* Bartolomeu Diaz, Vasco da Gama, Christopher Columbus, Fernao de Magalhaes (Ferdinand Magellan), and so on. This quest for an alternative trade route to the East—one that would have to be seaborne—was also, of course, a function of the desire to bypass the very people who had introduced them to the Eastern luxury commodities they so eagerly sought: their hated enemies, the Muslim intermediaries, who straddled the land-bridge between the East and the West and who at the same time held a monopoly over this ever-increasingly important and obscenely profitable East/West trade. (Only a few decades earlier [on May 29, 1453], prior to the departure of Columbus [on August 3, 1492] on his historic sea quest, Constantinople had fallen before the victorious forces of the Muslim Turks under the leadership of Sultan Mehmed II, thus effectively and permanently placing the landbridge in the hands of the Muslims.)

4. There is some doubt as to exactly how the compass arrived in the West from the East in that, according to Watt (1972), it was probably invented jointly by the Muslims and Westerners (one reciprocally improving on the creation of the other) on the basis of the original Chinese discovery of the magnetic properties of the lodestone. Be that as it may, it is yet another instance pointing to the fact that the story of the diffusion to the West (via the Islamic intermediary) of the products of the Eastern technological genius is one that has yet to be told in its entirety.

Yet, the European commercial debt to Islam goes even deeper. For, as Fernand Braudel (1982) reminds one in volume 2 of his three-volume *magnum opus* (grandly titled *Civilization and Capitalism*), a number of critical elements of European long-distance trade were of Islamic origin; such as the “bill of exchange,” the *commenda* (a partnership of merchants), and even the art of executing complex calculations—without which no advanced commerce is possible.⁵ In fact, as Braudel further points out (p. 559), the very practice of long-distance trade itself in medieval Europe was an Islamic borrowing. Now, without long-distance trade, it is quite unlikely that Europe would have experienced the rise of merchant capitalism (and therefrom industrial capitalism following the colonization of the Americas); for, while such trade may not be a sufficient condition for its development, it is a necessary condition.

Of course, it is not, it must be stressed here, that Europe had never engaged in long-distance trade before—consider the long-distance trade of the Greeks and the Romans with the East (e.g. via the famed Silk Road)—but, like so many other things, it was reintroduced to them by the Islamic civilization, since the Europeans had, for all intents and purposes, “lost” it over the centuries with their retrogressive descent into the post-Alaric world of the Germanic dominated European Early Middle Ages.⁶ On the basis of these observations, Braudel, is compelled to remark: “To admit the existence of these borrowings means turning one’s back on traditional accounts of the history of the West as pioneering genius, spontaneous inventor, journeying alone along the road toward scientific and technical rationality. It means denying the claim of the medieval Italian city-states to have invented the instruments of modern commercial life. And it logically culminates in denying the Roman empire its role as the cradle of progress” (p. 556).

However, it wasn’t only in the area of technology alone that Islam came to play such an important role in the genesis of Western modernity as we know it today. Consider the foundational role of the modern university in Europe in the journey toward the European Renaissance, but from the perspective of its origins. From a broader historical perspective, the modern university *is as much Western in origin as it is Islamic (that is Afro-Asiatic) in origin*. How? Nakosteen (1964: vii) explains it this way: “At a time when European monarchs were hiring tutors to teach them how to sign their names, Muslim educational institutions were preserving, modifying and improving upon the classical cultures in their progressive colleges and research centers under enlightened rulers. Then as the results of their cumulative and creative genius reached the Latin West through translations... they brought about that Western revival of learning which is our modern heritage.” Making the same observation, James Burke (1995: 36) reminds us that at the point in time when the first European universities at Bologna and Charters were being created, their future as academic centers of learning was far from certain. The reason? He explains: “The medieval mind was still weighed down by centuries of superstition, still fearful of new thought, still totally obedient to the Church and its Augustinian rejection of the investigation of nature. They lacked a system for investigation, a tool with which to ask questions and, above all, they lacked the knowledge once possessed by the Greeks, of which medieval Europe had heard, but which had been lost.” But then, he further explains: “In one electrifying moment it was rediscovered. In 1085 the [Muslim] citadel of Toledo in Spain fell, and the victorious Christian troops found a literary treasure beyond anything they could have dreamed of.” Through the mediation of Spanish Jews, European Christians, and others, much of that learning would now be translated from Arabic, which for centuries had been *the* language of science, into Latin, Spanish, Hebrew, and other languages, to be disseminated all across Europe. (This translation activity, one would be remiss not to point out here parenthetically, was a replication of an earlier translation activity undertaken by the Muslims themselves over a 300-year period, eighth to tenth centuries, when they *systematically* organized the translation of Greek scientific works into Arabic—see Gutas 1998, and O’Leary 1949, for a detailed and fascinating account.)

5. In a riveting exegesis, Benoit (1995) not only demonstrates the Islamic roots of Western mathematics, but also alerts one to a less well-known fact: it is primarily through the agency of commerce that Islamic mathematics in general was diffused to the West and it is in the environment of commerce that it first began to undergo innovation—greatly helped of course with the introduction of those seemingly mundane (as seen from the vantage point of today) artifacts of Eastern origin: Indo-Arabic numerals, and paper! This process especially got underway in Europe in the fourteenth-century as parts of it, notably the Italian city states like Florence, evolved on to the path of merchant capitalism.

6. The importance of the development of European long-distance trade (and Islam’s role in it) cannot be overemphasized. For, long-distance trade had the indirect outcome of accelerating a number of internally rooted, but incipient transformations in Europe, that in time would be of great import, including: its urbanization, the emergence of merchant capitalism, and the disintegration of European feudalism (the last precipitating, in turn, the massive European diasporic movement to the Americas, and elsewhere, with all the other attendant consequences, including the monumental **Columbian Exchange**).

During the long periods of peaceful co-existence among Christians, Jews, Muslims and others in Spain, even after the surrender of Toledo, was also highly instrumental in facilitating the work of translation and knowledge export into Western Europe. To a lesser extent, but important still, the fall of Muslim Sicily, beginning with the capture of Messina in 1061 by Count Roger (brother of Robert Guiscard), and ending with his complete takeover of the island from the Muslims in 1091, was yet another avenue by which Muslim learning entered, via translations, Western Europe (see Ahmed 1975, for more).⁷ This export of Islamic and Islamic-mediated Greek science to the Latin West would continue well into the thirteenth-century (after all, Islam was not completely vanquished from the Iberian peninsula until the capture of the Muslim province of Granada, more than 400 years after the fall of Toledo, in 1492).

SECTION SIX

The Muslim Jesus provides common ground for Christianity, Islam

by [Ra'fat Al-Dajani](#) Aug 25, 2017

SOURCE: National Catholic Reporter, at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/muslim-jesus-provides-common-ground-christianity-islam>

As the country sits transfixed with one of the strangest, divisive and most unpredictable presidencies in the history of the United States, lost in the madness has been the increase in Islamophobia since Donald Trump was elected president.

Islamophobia, [defined as](#) "unfounded hostility towards Muslims and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" has become frighteningly commonplace in the U.S. and this hatred and misinformation has found fertile soil in the past eight months of the Trump presidency.

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The Council on American-Islamic Relations [has documented](#) 451 incidents that stemmed from anti-Muslim bias between April 1 and June 30, 2017, 15 percent of which were acts of violence against Muslims. This represents a 91 percent increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes during that time compared to the same time period in 2016.

These crimes occur in a conducive environment. A [Pew Research Center survey](#) in 2017 rated Muslims at 48 degrees, the lowest on a 0-100 "feeling thermometer" out of nine religious groups in the United States, two points lower than atheists. Particularly negative feelings towards Muslims were harbored by Republicans and those who were Republican-leaning.

The irony here is that most Americans really have no idea what is in the Quran, the Muslim equivalent of the Bible, beyond the mostly negative and out of context soundbites they hear on talk radio, cable TV or the internet. They have no idea that the three monotheistic religions that follow the same [Abrahamic tradition](#), namely that Abraham was the first prophet of God, are Judaism, Christianity and yes, the third sibling, Islam.

7. While it is true that evidence so far indicates that the bulk of Greco-Islamic learning arrived in Europe through the translation activity in Spain and Italy, Burnett (2003) shows that some of this learning also seeped into Europe by means of translations of works that were imported directly from the Islamic East, but executed by Latin scholars in other places (like Antioch and Pisa).

All three religions were born in the Middle East and are inextricably linked to each another. While Christianity was born from within the Jewish tradition, Islam developed from both Christianity and Judaism. In fact, Islam sees itself as the culmination of the Abrahamic faiths, the final revelation by God in the monotheistic tradition.

The Quran specifically protects Jews and Christians as *Peoples of the Book*, the "Book" meaning revelations from God to Jews and Christians which gives them a spiritual connection to Islam.

As such, Islam recognizes as prophets many of the figures revered by Jews and Christians, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. For Muslims, Muhammad is not a divine being. Instead he is a prophet through whom God delivered his message and an example of piety to emulate. Muhammad is not the equivalent of Jesus in the Islamic tradition, rather it is the Quran that occupies the same central position in Islam as Jesus does in Christianity.

It would surprise many to know that the Prophet Muhammad is only mentioned a total of four times in the Quran while Jesus, the son of Mary, is mentioned 25 times and Moses 136 times. The Quran dedicates a whole chapter to Mary, who is the only woman mentioned by name in the sacred text.

The Islamic version of the Jesus story especially, is quite similar to the Christian version. Jesus is [variously referred to as](#) "Spirit from God, "Word from/of God"), "Prophet-Messenger of God," and the "Messiah" who will come back on the Day of Judgment to destroy the Antichrist.

Beginning with his birth, Muslims believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary in a miraculous birth ordained by God. The Quranic verse says:

"Relate in the Book the story of Mary, when she withdrew from her family, to a place in the East. She screened herself from them; then We sent to her Our spirit (angel Gabriel) and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. She said: 'I seek refuge from you in God Most Gracious (come not near) if you do fear God.' He said: 'Nay, I am only a Messenger from your Lord, to announce to you the gift of a pure son.' She said: 'How shall I have a son, when no man has ever touched me, and I am not unchaste?' He said: 'So it will be, your Lord says: 'That is easy for Me; and We wish to appoint him as a sign unto men and a Mercy from Us: It was a matter so decreed.' " (Quran 19:16-21).

The Quran also relays how Jesus spoke in the cradle: "Then she (Mary) pointed to him. They said: 'How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?' He (Jesus) said: 'Verily! I am a slave of God, He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet.'" (Quran 19:29-30).

The miracles performed by Jesus were not limited to his cradle according to the Quran. Muslims believe Jesus performed miracles throughout his life: "Then will God say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favor to you and to your mother. Behold! I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit (the angel Gabriel) so that you did speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught you the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel. And behold: you make out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and you breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by My leave, and you heal those born blind, and the lepers by My leave. And behold! you bring forth the dead by My leave.' " (Quran 5:110).

Naturally there are theological differences between Muslims and Christians regarding Jesus but there are far more similarities and these similarities are what should be emphasized in order to show the common ground between these two faiths, [which together represent](#) 4.1 billion followers worldwide and 55.3 percent of the world's population.

The importance of finding common ground has become particularly apparent after the events in Charlottesville this month, which laid bare real and deep divisions in our country. Reconciling Christianity and Islam based on a true understanding of each other's religions could serve as a bulwark against these divisions and provide a worldwide example to emulate.

The Professor Wore a Hijab in Solidarity — Then Lost Her Job

By Ruth Graham OCT. 13, 2016

SOURCE: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/magazine/the-professor-wore-a-hijab-in-solidarity-then-lost-her-job.html>

When Larycia Hawkins, the first black woman to receive tenure at Wheaton College, made a symbolic gesture of support for Muslims, the evangelical college became divided over what intellectual freedom on its campus really meant.

Three days after Larycia Hawkins agreed to step down from her job at Wheaton College, an evangelical school in Wheaton, Ill., she joined her former colleagues and students for what was billed as a private service of reconciliation. It was a frigid Tuesday evening last February, and attendance was optional, but Wheaton's largest chapel was nearly full by the time the event began. A large cross had been placed on the stage, surrounded by tea lights that snaked across the blond floorboards in glowing trails.

[...]

Wheaton had spent the previous two months embroiled in what was arguably the most public and contentious trial of its 156-year history. In December, Hawkins wrote a [theologically complex Facebook post](#) announcing her intention to wear a hijab during Advent, in solidarity with Muslims; the college placed her on leave within days and soon moved to fire her. Jesse Jackson had compared Hawkins with Rosa Parks, while Franklin Graham, an evangelist and Billy Graham's son, declared, "Shame on her!" Students protested, fasted and tweeted. Donors, parents and alumni were in an uproar. On this winter evening, the first black female professor to achieve tenure at the country's most prominent evangelical college was now unemployed and preparing to address the community to which she had devoted the past nine years of her life. As a Wheaton anthropology professor, Brian Howell, wrote in January, the episode had become "something of a Rorschach test for those wondering about the state of Wheaton College, evangelicalism and even U.S. Christianity."

As Hawkins climbed the stairs to the stage that night, a few dozen students stood up in the front rows. They were wearing all black and had planned this quiet bit of theater as a show of solidarity. For a long beat, they stood together between Hawkins and the seated crowd. Then, one by one, others in the audience began to rise. The silence held for a full minute, as a majority of the room stood.

Then Hawkins began to speak. She told the hushed crowd that they should see Jesus in the oppressed, that Christianity is inherently political and that "bubbles are made to burst." And she read the first chapter of the book of Isaiah, a blistering prophecy for the rebellious nation of Israel spoken in the voice of an angry God. "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you," she read, her voice growing steadier with every line. "Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. ... The strong man will become tinder, his work also a spark. Thus they shall both burn together."

When Hawkins began teaching politics at Wheaton College in 2007, she wanted to be known as a professor who challenged her students' preconceptions. Her classes included "Race and the Politics of Welfare" and "Race and the

Obama Presidency.” She talked about how Obama had to appear to “transcend” race in order to get elected, about why he spoke differently to black and white audiences, about how polling data suggested that he would have won by an even larger margin were he white. At the end of her upper-level classes, she would cook a big meal at her apartment, and students presented their final research over dessert. She found her students to be smart and engaged, and she was pleasantly surprised by their open-mindedness and the diversity of their views. “It was like any other amazing liberal-arts institution,” she said. “It just happened to be an evangelical Christian context.”

[....]

As Hawkins settled in at Wheaton, she struggled. Though she loved her students, the heavy teaching load was stressful, especially for a self-described perfectionist. As a black woman in a predominantly white community, she was asked to serve on many committees and participate frequently in public events like panel discussions. Those commitments left little time for research and writing, though she still received tenure on schedule in 2013. Her health and social life suffered. She rarely had time for exercise or her book club anymore, dating was difficult, and she battled chronic sinus infections, migraines and high blood pressure, which she attributed to stress.

Much of that stress seemed to derive from her almost bodily awareness of the world’s problems. In one of our half-dozen conversations over eight months, she described seeing people look happy and knowing she was different because she felt so weighed down by the injustices she saw and read about. She quotes Old Testament prophets from memory; several people described her to me as prophetic herself. As we spoke, her concerns veered from the Syrian refugee crisis to Rwandan genocide to gun violence to income inequality. Those worries are a burden she bears as a political scientist and as a Christian, she told me.

A year or two after arriving on campus, she developed a distaste for performances of patriotism and decided to stop saluting the flag and singing the national anthem. “I feel very strongly that my first allegiance is to a different kingdom than an earthly kingdom,” she told me. “It’s to a heavenly kingdom, and it’s to the principles of that kingdom.” Evangelicals tend to emphasize righteousness on an individual scale, but Hawkins was becoming attracted to theological traditions that emphasize systemic sin and repentance.

In particular, she was reading a lot of *black liberation theology*, a strain of thinking that emerged from the Black Power movement of the 1960s. Jesus’ central mission was to liberate the oppressed, the philosophy argues, but mainstream American Christianity is beholden to irredeemably corrupt “white theology.” The tone of black liberation is often angry — think of Jeremiah Wright’s infamous “God damn America” sermon — and conservative evangelicals are wary of it because of its theological pessimism and its politically radical roots. But Hawkins was beginning to view many of the Bible’s commands through a lens of race and class. “Theology is always contextual,” she told me, a core idea of black liberation theology. She said that evangelicals have trouble confronting “an ontological blackness of Christ.” Responding to Wheaton’s charge for professors to “integrate faith and learning,” she took these ideas into the classroom.

[...]

True solidarity, Hawkins was coming to believe, involves physical risk and sustained labor. It also involves recognizing that structural inequality is a kind of violence, with physical effects on its victims. She referred to a passage in the book of Luke in which Jesus’ followers fail to recognize him after his resurrection. “My question is who do we not have the eyes to see?” Hawkins said. “That’s the question that plagues my soul: Who am I not seeing in their suffering? What entire groups of people, humans, do I not see suffering?”

[...]

Dr. Larycia Hawkins, center, at a news conference in Chicago on Dec. 16, 2015, the day after she was put on leave from Wheaton College.



On Dec. 10, 2015, Hawkins wrote a Facebook post that would set in motion the end of her employment at Wheaton. The post was 11 paragraphs, and it announced her intention to wear a hijab throughout the season of Advent, as a show of “embodied solidarity” with Muslims. Donald Trump had recently called for a total ban on Muslims entering the United States, and the Liberty University president, Jerry Falwell Jr., had mused publicly about how looser concealed-carry laws could help “end those Muslims.” “I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book,” Hawkins wrote in response. “And as Pope Francis stated last week, we worship the same God.” The post ended with the words “Shalom friends.”

Almost immediately, administrators began to hear from concerned alumni, donors and parents of students and prospective students. One home-schooling mother of seven left an indignant message for Anderson, Hawkins’s department chairwoman, saying the family made great sacrifices to send their daughter to Wheaton, and they expected her to receive a Christian worldview there. December is a month in which many donors make significant end-of-year gifts and when high-school seniors are making their final decisions about where to apply to college. Jones would later describe the response from prospective students’ parents as a “tidal wave”; at the time the post appeared, he characterized the financial threat as one that would imperil 15 to 20 faculty jobs. Five days after her post appeared, Jones called Hawkins into a meeting, asked her to respond in writing to several “Areas of Significant Concern” and placed her on paid administrative leave.

[...]

In August, six months after Hawkins left Wheaton, she met with me in her office at the University of Virginia, where she had accepted a research fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. The week before, she loaded up her car and drove to Charlottesville from her home just outside Chicago. Two tall shelves in her new office were filling up with books and knickknacks: a Hello Kitty lunchbox, a shadow box with old campaign

buttons, a small replica of a church window. A painting by a former student depicted Jesus as a black man with a gold halo, in the style of a Catholic icon. Hawkins said he reminded her of Tupac Shakur.

Since her controversial leave-taking from Wheaton, she had become something of a celebrity in the small world of interfaith media and nonprofits. In the spring, she began taking speaking engagements, and she traveled to accept awards from religious organizations in Michigan, New York and Washington. In June, she flew to Turkey with a Chicago-based Islamic nonprofit organization to meet with Syrian refugees. Strangers have recognized her on airplanes and on the street; she is wary of dating online, for fear she'll be recognized there too. She recently worked out a deal with HarperOne to write a book about "embodied solidarity," a concept she returned to over and over throughout the preceding months.

[...]

In her new office, we talked about Wheaton and about Jesus, about her evolving faith and about Donald Trump. Hawkins's voice is both gentle and totally assured, and she speaks in long elliptical paragraphs that tend to eddy into generalities. If conservatives in Wheaton's constituency were disturbed by her Facebook post, they would most likely not have been comforted by our conversation. The kind of politics and the kind of faith she wants to be a part of is the kind that's about "liberating people's bodies, not just their souls," she said. "Jesus came to save bodies. ... Theology only matters to the extent that bodies matter." She told me that she's not going to church regularly right now, but she still values institutional religion as a keeper of rituals and milestones.

[...]