

The Muslim Contribution to the Formation of United States Identity from the 19th to the 20st Century

Johan Septian Putra¹, Alkhairi²

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Ar Risalah Sumatera Barat, Indonesia

² Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study examines the contributions of early Muslim communities—encompassing enslaved African Muslims and Middle Eastern immigrants from the late 19th to the early 20th century—to the process of shaping the United States as a pluralistic and multicultural nation. Although the presence of Muslims has been recorded since the period of slavery, mainstream American historical narratives have tended to marginalize the significant roles of the Muslim community in the nation's social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics. Through a historical-qualitative approach and a "history from below" historiographical analysis, this research highlights how Muslims acted as active agents in confronting marginalization, preserving their religious and cultural identities, and building social structures that supported their community's sustainability. This study demonstrates that their contributions were not limited to religious aspects but also extended to economic, cultural, and civil rights struggles, particularly through African-American Islamic movements. These findings challenge the assumption that Islam is a foreign element in American history, instead asserting that it is an integral part of the nation's formation. By tracing the hidden vestiges of Muslim communities, this article aims to enrich a more inclusive and representative American historical narrative while contributing theoretically to the study of multiculturalism, national identity, and religious history in the United States.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji kontribusi komunitas Muslim yang mencakup Muslim Afrika yang diperbudak dan imigran dari Timur Tengah pada akhir abad ke-19 hingga awal abad ke-20 terhadap proses pembentukan Amerika Serikat sebagai negara yang pluralistik dan multikultural. Meskipun keberadaan umat Muslim telah tercatat sejak masa perbudakan, narasi sejarah arus utama Amerika cenderung meminggirkan peran penting komunitas Muslim dalam dinamika sosial, budaya, dan spiritual negara tersebut. Melalui pendekatan historis-kualitatif dan analisis historiografi "sejarah dari bawah", penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana umat Islam berperan sebagai agen aktif dalam menghadapi marginalisasi, melestarikan identitas agama dan budaya mereka, serta membangun struktur sosial yang mendukung keberlanjutan komunitas mereka. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa kontribusi mereka tidak terbatas pada aspek keagamaan, tetapi juga meluas ke perjuangan ekonomi, budaya, dan hak-hak sipil, terutama melalui gerakan-gerakan Islam Afrika-Amerika. Temuan-temuan ini menantang asumsi bahwa Islam merupakan unsur asing dalam sejarah Amerika, sebaliknya menegaskan bahwa Islam merupakan bagian integral dari pembentukan bangsa tersebut. Dengan menelusuri jejak-jejak tersembunyi komunitas Muslim, artikel ini bertujuan untuk memperkaya narasi sejarah Amerika yang lebih inklusif dan representatif, sekaligus memberikan kontribusi teoretis terhadap studi multikulturalisme, identitas nasional, dan sejarah agama di Amerika Serikat.

Keywords

American Islam, American identity, Muslim immigrants

Article History

Received: 2026-06-20

Accepted: 2026-06-30

Published: 2026-07-21

Contact

johan.albusyro@gmail.com

Kata Kunci

American identity, Imigran Muslim, Muslim Amerika



Introduction

Historically, the Americas—North, Central, and South—have been predominantly recognized as regions with a Christian majority. While North America is largely inhabited by Protestants, Central and South America are predominantly Catholic. This condition stems from the historical background of the Americas, having been colonized by Portugal, Spain, Britain (Gianturi et.al, 2024), and France. Given the Christian majority in the Americas, Muslims constitute a minority. Despite a growing body of scholarship on Islam in America, the role of Muslim communities in shaping American national identity remains underexplored, leading to the common assumption that Islam does not have a significant presence there (Setiawan & Affan, 2019, p. 112).

Essentially, American society is a religious one, and Islam has become one of the religions that coexist alongside Christianity and Judaism. In recent years, this faith has rapidly emerged to the surface and has become a compelling phenomenon to observe, particularly as many are surprised by facts showing that Islam can develop effectively in the United States (Wahyuni, 2018, p. 79). The United States commands global attention not only in politics and economics but also in the realm of religion, which displays a unique character. Every religion and its various branches can thrive on American soil. The presence of Islam in the United States dates back several centuries; some argue that Muslims were present even before Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. Others contend that Islam entered the United States in the late 19th century, concurrent with the arrival of immigrants from the Middle East (Curtis IV, 2009, p. 4).

The history of the United States is frequently understood through a dominant White, Christian-Protestant narrative, which marginalizes the contributions of minority groups, including early Muslim communities. In fact, the presence of Muslims in America has been documented since the 18th century; some research even indicates that 10–20% of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas were Muslim. Their contributions in shaping America's social, economic, and cultural landscapes have long been neglected in mainstream historiography. In the current era of discourse on pluralism and identity diversity, it is crucial to revisit the history of early Muslim communities in America and examine their role in shaping the nation's identity (Moore, 2016, p. 2).

Muslims in the United States, whether native-born or immigrants, have consistently endeavored to adapt to American life. In this regard, they have often attempted to minimize overt expressions of their Islamic identity that might highlight differences between themselves and their non-Muslim counterparts, reflecting a form of interfaith tolerance practiced within American society. Religious life in the United States functions in alignment with constitutional commitments; the government does not intervene in determining the religion of its citizens. Although a majority religion exerts significant influence over social, political, and cultural life, this influence does not obstruct the religious activities of minority faiths, as they coexist within the context of daily life.

Narratives concerning the formation of American identity are often dominated by stories of European immigrant groups and the complex racial dynamics between White and African-American populations. While the contributions of other groups are increasingly recognized, the history of early Muslim communities in the United States, particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries often remains relegated to a

footnote in national historiography. This period is crucial as it marks the arrival of early waves of immigrants from various Muslim-majority regions, as well as the phenomenon of religious conversion to Islam among Americans, particularly within the African-American community.

This article argues that these early Muslim communities were not merely passive minority groups, but active participants who made significant contributions across various aspects of American life, thereby helping to shape the American identity as we know it today. Their contributions span the economic sphere through participation in various industries, the social sphere through the establishment of organizations and community networks, the cultural sphere through the exchange of traditions and perspectives, and the intellectual sphere through the ideas and insights they brought with them (Moore, 2016, p. 3).

This research aims to delve deeper into these hidden historical traces, reconstruct a narrative concerning the lives and contributions of early Muslim communities, and integrate them into a more inclusive understanding of American identity formation. By highlighting the active and diverse roles of these early Muslim communities, this article seeks to revise our understanding of the roots of American diversity and emphasize the importance of including all constituent groups in a comprehensive historiography.

This research is designed to address fundamental questions regarding the presence of Muslims in the United States, specifically: How did early Muslim communities including enslaved Africans and Middle Eastern immigrants, they contribute to the process of shaping the United States as a pluralistic and multicultural nation? Furthermore, it questions to what extent their active roles in social, economic, and intellectual dynamics can challenge mainstream historical narratives that have traditionally marginalized their positions.

Literature review, find many relevance study with this research. The first from Muna Ali, "Muslim American/American Muslim Identity: Authoring Self in Post-9/11 America", the article explain about Muslim American identity is forged by the American experience, with Muslims perceiving their Islam as more authentic and facing suspicion and identity challenges, contributing to U.S. identity through these complex interactions (Ali, 2011).

The second from G. Simmons "From Muslims in America to American Muslims", the article explain about the Muslim contribution to the formation of United States identity is complex, with historical roots and ongoing ideological struggles within African American, Arab, and South Asian communities affecting their influence on domestic and foreign policies (Simmons, 2008).

The third from Kambiz GhaneaBassiri "Muslims in America from the European Colonial Period to the Present", the article explain about Muslims have contributed to the formation of United States identity by challenging stereotypes, forming black Muslim national identities, and mediating between US and Muslim-majority countries, despite facing racialization and binary perceptions (GhaneaBassiri, 2018).

The last from Irfan A. Omar "Becoming American? The Forging of Arab and Muslim Identity in Pluralist America By Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad", the article explain about Muslims have contributed to the formation of U.S. identity through their diverse identities and integration into American society, seeking political freedom, economic

opportunities, and a better life, with evidence from historical studies and observations of acculturation and assimilation processes (Omar, 2014).

The novelty of this study lies in its use of a "history from below" approach to recover hidden and under-documented narratives. Unlike existing literature that tends to situate the significant presence of Islam in America primarily in the post-1965 era following the Immigration and Nationality Act, this research traces the timeline back to the 19th century. It demonstrates that Islam is not a foreign element but an integral part of the nation's identity formation from its earlier stages. Moreover, it asserts that Muslims were not merely passive observers but active agents who consciously established social structures and negotiated their status within American society.

In the context of this study, social identity theory also posits that identity serves to categorize members into groups. Octawidyanata (2016, p. 18) argues that social identity theory represents an effort by members to elevate their own status and the position of their group. Tajfel & Turner (1979) state that an individual's social identity is determined by the group to which they belong. Consequently, individuals are motivated to join groups perceived as attractive or beneficial to their members. Furthermore, Tajfel & Turner observe that individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity (Utami & Silalahi, 2013). Thus, when a social identity is perceived as unsatisfying, they begin to seek groups considered more fulfilling, comfortable, and pleasant. American national identity is understood not as a singular or homogeneous construct, but as the outcome of complex interactions among diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups negotiating their positions in the public sphere. This identity involves an ongoing process of negotiation between core Islamic principles and the foundational values of the "American Creed," which includes individualism, democracy, and religious freedom. American Muslims construct their identity as part of a "plural mosaic," maintaining their religious distinctiveness while actively engaging in civic life, voting, and political participation. Thus, Muslim-American identity serves as evidence of how religious diversity enriches rather than contradicts fundamental national principles

Method

This study employs historical research methods. Louis Gottschalk describes the historical method as a process of testing and analyzing historical evidence to discover authentic and credible data, as well as the attempt to synthesize that data into a historical narrative (Gottschalk, 1950). The scientific aspect of this method involves describing and formulating general principles through comparative studies of facts. The procedure of the historical method encompasses four stages: heuristics (the collection of materials or sources), source criticism (internal and external criticism), interpretation (the classification of data and the search for causal laws), and explanation in the form of historiography (Abdurahman, 2019; Putra 2021; Sjamsuddin 2014). The utilizes historical research methods through the following systematic steps:

Heuristics (Source Collection), the process begins with heuristics, gathering the primary materials required to reconstruct the contributions of Muslim communities to the formation of United States identity from the 19th to the 21st century. The sources include scholarly literature such as books, research journals, and historical documents

detailing the trajectory of Muslim immigrants. Key references include the works of John L. Esposito on the modern Islamic world, James R. Moore's studies on the *American Creed* and pluralism, and historiographical data concerning early African Muslims such as Ayyub ibn Sulayman Diallo. Furthermore, narratives regarding major organizations, such as the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), alongside the roles of public figures like Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, serve as vital data points.

Source criticism or verification, the next step involves source criticism, which encompasses external criticism to verify the authenticity of the sources and internal criticism to evaluate the credibility and quality of the information regarding the role of Muslims in America's social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics. This critique aims to filter relevant data from mainstream historical narratives that have traditionally marginalized the contributions of minority groups.

Subsequently, interpretation is conducted by employing interdisciplinary social science approaches, such as multiculturalism and the sociology of religion, to classify data and identify causal relationships between the Muslim presence and the development of America's pluralistic identity. This process involves a profound analysis of how Muslim communities have negotiated their values with the "American Creed," including principles of democracy and religious freedom.

Historiography, the final stage is historiography, which involves synthesizing the interpreted data and facts into a cohesive and inclusive historical narrative. This historiography seeks to challenge the assumption that Islam is a foreign element in the United States, instead asserting that Muslim communities are active agents integral to the formation of the nation's identity.

Result and Discussion

The Early Arrival of Islam in the United States

While there is no official consensus regarding the exact beginning of Islam's arrival in America, rumors persist that Columbus successfully landed in the Americas with the assistance of a Moroccan navigator. A Muslim geographer reported that long before Columbus, eight Muslim maritime experts set out from Lisbon to explore the Atlantic, eventually landing in a region around South America. This information was allegedly utilized by Columbus to navigate the land across the Atlantic known as America. Although many historians strongly challenge these claims as lacking a solid historical foundation, most scholars do not deny that Muslim migration to the Americas occurred between the 16th and 18th centuries (Thohir, 2002, p. 321). Several authors have proposed the possibility of Muslim transatlantic voyages prior to Columbus; however, these claims remain highly contested among mainstream historians.

Certain interpretations suggest that Andalusian Muslims visited the American continent well before Columbus, as reported by Al-Sharif Al-Idrisi in the 12th century CE. Furthermore, there is credible evidence regarding visits to the Caribbean from West African kingdoms. A widely recognized fact is that Portuguese and Spanish explorers were led by Andalusian Muslim sailors who possessed superior knowledge of the open seas. Some of these explorers were *Moriscos*—Muslims from Spain. Additionally, records indicate that Andalusian Muslim migrants from Al-Ribat and Sala, Morocco, led

naval engagements against Spanish and Portuguese ships in the Atlantic, reaching as far as the Caribbean coast (Wahyuni, 2018, p. 80).

Between 1619 and 1663, several African slaves were recorded in America, including Yarrow Mamout and Muhammad Bah. Earlier, in 1539, a Moroccan Muslim participated in an expedition to Arizona and New Mexico alongside the Crown Prince of New Spain. Additionally, in the 1500s, an Egyptian named Nazaruddin settled in the Catskills, New York, where he was reportedly executed for the killing of an Indigenous woman (Tholib & Saiful, 2015, p. 292). Other references point to the origins of Islam in America through the history of the slave trade. Among the slaves recorded by the American Ethnological Society were educated Muslims, such as Ayyub ibn Sulayman Diallo, a Prince of Bundu from Africa who was kidnapped and sold into slavery in 1730. After three years, he was emancipated in recognition of his intelligence, honesty, and empathy toward the White population (Wahyuni, 2018, p. 81).

These claims may hold merit, given the historical fact that minority Muslim communities were dispersed along the coasts of North and South America, including Suriname. An undeniable reality is that Muslims in this region primarily consisted of Black Muslims and immigrants from Islamic nations such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan. American history records that Black (African) individuals entered America primarily as slaves or low-wage laborers. This historical reality significantly influenced the attitudes of White Americans toward Black people and, concurrently, toward Islam as their belief system (Moore, 2016, p. 7; Wahyuni, 2018, p. 81).

The primary argument describing Muslim migration to America is further strengthened by sources stating that the first Muslim residents migrated around 1875 and 1912 from rural Syria. John L. Esposito supports the notion that the initial arrival of Muslim migrants occurred when European nobility imported slaves from Africa. It is estimated that one-fifth of these slaves were Muslim; however, upon their arrival in the Americas, many were forced to renounce their original faith and convert to Christianity (Esposito, 1995, p. 121).

Waves of Muslim Immigration to the United States

The arrival of the first Muslim migrants in America exerted both direct and indirect influences on the local population. These interactions between indigenous residents and migrants significantly impacted America's demographic, political, economic, and trade sectors. The factors and effects of these migration waves can be categorized as follows:

First Wave (1875–1912), migrants in this wave were generally uneducated and unskilled village youths from what are now Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon—territories then under the administration of the Ottoman Empire. Driven by unfavorable economic conditions in their home countries, they sought economic improvement in the United States. Due to limited education and English proficiency, most found employment in beverage factories and retail shops. Settling near industrial hubs, they faced integration challenges, which led them to form exclusive social ties with fellow Muslims (Wahyuni, 2018, pp. 81–82).

Second Wave (1918–1922), this migration wave occurred in the aftermath of World War I (Supratman, 2017, p. 121). The migrants were generally educated urban intellectuals, often arriving as relatives or acquaintances of those already established

in the United States. This period coincided with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which had previously governed much of the Muslim-majority Middle East (Armin 2022:8). as well as the expansion of Western colonial rule in the region. Many arrived in the U.S. to join family members who had already attained a stable livelihood in the country. However, the U.S. Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 implemented quota systems for specific nations, which significantly reduced the number of Muslims permitted to enter the country (Vitria, 2023, p. 3).

The third wave of migration, spanning from 1930 to 1938, was characterized by a more coordinated arrival of individuals compared to preceding periods. This migratory trend was primarily shaped and conditioned by shifting United States immigration policies that implemented prioritization systems. Specifically, these policies favored potential immigrants who already had family members legally residing or established within the United States. By institutionalizing family reunification as a key criterion for entry, these policy frameworks effectively structured the social composition of incoming Muslim populations during this decade, ensuring that subsequent arrivals were able to leverage existing community networks for their initial settlement (Wahyuni, 2018, p. 82).

During the fourth immigration period, spanning approximately from 1947 to 1960, the United States experienced a substantial increase in immigration flows. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1957 introduced an annual quota system allocated on a country-by-country basis. Because these quotas were calculated proportionally according to the demographic composition of the United States population, the majority of admissible immigrants continued to originate from European countries. Nevertheless, Muslim migration to the United States persisted and gradually diversified in origin. Muslim immigrants arrived not only from the Middle East but also from a broader range of regions, including India (Raess et.al, 2023, p. 578) Pakistan, Eastern Europe (Putra & Karali, 2022) and the Soviet Union (Armin, 2022, p. 9). A significant proportion of these migrants settled in major metropolitan areas, particularly Chicago and New York, reflecting broader patterns of urban concentration among post-war immigrant populations. In contrast to earlier migration cohorts, many immigrants during this period were relatively urban-educated and possessed higher levels of formal education (Wahyuni, 2018, p. 82). Their migration motivations were heterogeneous, commonly encompassing forced displacement as refugees, as well as voluntary aspirations such as improved socioeconomic conditions, access to higher education, advanced technical training, and specialized professional employment opportunities.

The fifth immigration wave is generally considered to have begun in 1967 and continues into the present period. This contemporary wave is widely associated with both domestic policy restructuring in the United States and broader geopolitical developments across parts of the Muslim world (Armin, 2022, p. 10). A critical policy turning point occurred in 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which effectively abolished immigration quotas based on national origin or ethnic composition. Consequently, for the first time since the early twentieth century, eligibility for entry into the United States was no longer primarily determined by racial or ethnic background (Vitria, 2023, p. 7). This policy shift marked a structural transformation in the American immigration regime,

contributing to a more globally diverse pattern of migrant inflows in subsequent decades.

Migration in the fifth wave, which began in 1967 and continues to the present, is characterized by a complex interplay of economic and political motivations. In addition to economic drivers, political factors appear to have played a central role in shaping migration flows during this period. Notably, many Arab countries experienced significant instability, largely associated with ongoing confrontations with Israel and other regional conflicts (Ahmed & Rashid, 2023, p. 3). These geopolitical tensions contributed to increased emigration, including migration toward the United States. Unlike earlier migration cohorts, a substantial proportion of immigrants in this wave were highly educated professionals and intellectuals. This educational profile appears to have facilitated relatively smoother labor market integration, particularly when compared to earlier immigrant groups with lower educational attainment.

Several prominent Muslim intellectuals and professionals emerged within this migration wave, many of whom occupied influential academic and institutional positions in the United States. Among them was Fazlur Rahman from Pakistan, who served as a professor at the University of Chicago. Sayyid Hossein Nasr from Iran held a professorial position at George Washington University, while Ismail al-Faruqi was affiliated with Harvard University as a professor. In addition to academic figures, Dawud Hasan of Palestine became associated with the Council of Masajid of the United States. Taha Jabir al-Alwani of Iraq later served as President of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, while Imam Khatab, an alumnus of Al-Azhar University and McGill University, served as imam and Director of the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo, Ohio (Prajha, 1992, pp. 106–10).

Muslim Immigration and Community Formation in the 20th Century

Muslim communities in the United States have increasingly established or participated in religiously based organizations. This development can be understood as a response to their minority status within a predominantly secular society. In this context, there appears to be a growing need to strengthen and preserve Muslim identity in the United States, which has often been pursued through collective organization within religious institutions and community associations in addition to navigating secular pressures and economic challenges. Muslim communities in the United States also face ongoing processes of cultural acculturation. Such processes, in some cases, may not only contribute to the gradual transformation of Muslim identity but have also been associated with religious conversion, predominantly toward Christianity (Setiawan & Affan, 2019, p. 115). While this trend should be interpreted cautiously, it highlights the complex dynamics of identity negotiation within a pluralistic society.

An interesting feature of Islamic development in the United States lies in its relatively plural and accommodative denominational landscape. Various Islamic traditions have been able to establish institutional presence and social recognition. Among these, Shi'a Islam has gained notable visibility beyond its traditional geographic centers in Iran and the Middle East. According to John L. Esposito, Shi'a communities have achieved a degree of institutional recognition within broader Muslim populations in the United States, particularly through their association with major mosques located in cities such as New York (Strasburg, 2023), Detroit, Washington, Los Angeles, and

Chicago, as well as in several major Canadian cities. Within the Shi'a spectrum, both Twelver (*Ithna 'Ashariyah*) and Ismaili communities are present in North America. The Ismaili community, in particular, is often described as a relatively affluent and highly organized transnational network, with an estimated population of approximately 80,000 adherents in Canada, concentrated mainly in Vancouver and Toronto, as well as smaller communities across the United States, particularly in New York and California. This community places strong emphasis on education and has developed a well-structured institutional system that supports the effective establishment of educational and social organizations in the United States (Esposito, 1995, p. 124).

The religious landscape of the United States has undergone significant transformation in recent decades. This shift is closely associated with the post-1965 immigration reforms, which removed race- and nationality-based criteria from immigration selection processes. As a result, the United States has evolved into a highly diverse multicultural and multireligious society operating within a liberal democratic framework. In terms of religious composition, approximately 60% of the population identifies as Protestant Christian (including 19% Baptist, 8% Methodist, 5% Lutheran, and 28% affiliated with various other denominations), 26% as Roman Catholic, 2.5% as Jewish, around 1% as Hindu, 1% as Buddhist, and approximately 2.5% as Muslim, alongside smaller religious minorities, including Shinto practitioners (Armin, 2022, p. 4).

Within this constitutional framework, particularly under the First Amendment guarantees of religious freedom, religious communities in the United States have been able to organize, institutionalize, and actively participate in broader social and political life. Over time, these communities have evolved into influential social actors that may contribute to public discourse and, in certain cases, policy considerations. Among these religious groups, Islam is often identified as one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States. This growth appears to be driven by multiple factors, including sustained immigration from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, natural population growth within Muslim communities, and conversion among native-born Americans. Estimates suggest that immigrant Muslims constitute a significant proportion of the Muslim population in the United States, with relatively high demographic growth rates compared to national averages. In addition, conversion to Islam is estimated at approximately 135,000 individuals per year (Armin, 2022, p. 4).

Population estimates of Muslims in the United States vary considerably across studies, reflecting differences in methodology and definitional criteria. In 1970, the Muslim population was estimated at approximately 500,000 individuals. By 1980, estimates suggested an increase to around 3 million. In 1986, this figure reportedly rose to approximately 4 million, representing a 21% increase over six years. By 1992, the American Muslim Council estimated between 5 and 8 million Muslims based on identity-based survey approaches. In contrast, the *Britannica Book of the Year* reported approximately 4.17 million Muslims in the United States in the early 2000s. These discrepancies indicate a consistent methodological divergence, with estimates produced by Muslim organizations generally higher than those of independent research institutions (Armin, 2022, p. 4).

The Muslim population in the United States is typically categorized into several sociological groups. First, indigenous or native-born American Muslims, who are born

and raised in the United States and hold American citizenship. Second, immigrant Muslims who migrated from their countries of origin and subsequently settled in the United States. Third, African American Muslim communities, including groups identifying under movements such as Bilali. Fourth, temporary Muslim residents, including diplomats, students, entrepreneurs, and other short-term residents, often referred to as sojourners (Vitria, 2023, p. 3).

Institutional Cohesion for Structuring the Community

During the same historical period, particularly among Muslim immigrants who settled permanently in the United States, community formation emerged as a key strategy for social cohesion and identity preservation. Muslim immigrants increasingly organized themselves into community-based structures to facilitate cooperation, maintain social networks, and strengthen religious and cultural solidarity. Over time, American Muslims established a range of formal organizations aimed at representing collective interests and supporting communal development. Among the early and most influential organizations were the Nation of Islam (NOI), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the Federation of Islamic Organizations (FIO), and the Muslim Students Association (MSA). At this stage, Muslim communities in the United States began a gradual process of social integration, while simultaneously engaging in constructive relationships with non-Muslim segments of American society (Armin, 2022, p. 9).

The Nation of Islam (NOI), founded in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad and later developed under Elijah Muhammad, played a significant role in the early articulation of Black Muslim identity in the United States. One of its most prominent figures was Malcolm X, whose early life experiences—marked by racial violence and structural discrimination, including the destruction of his family home by the Ku Klux Klan—profoundly shaped his political and religious consciousness. Malcolm X joined the Nation of Islam in 1947 at the age of 22 while he was incarcerated for criminal activity (Setiawan and Affan 2019, 118). His subsequent rise within the organization contributed significantly to the visibility and expansion of the NOI in American public discourse. However, this increased visibility also led to widespread misconceptions, with many observers mistakenly equating the Nation of Islam with mainstream Islam, despite its distinct theological orientation that primarily emphasized Black empowerment rather than orthodox Islamic doctrine.

At the federal level, both Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam were perceived as potential security concerns, resulting in surveillance efforts by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Nevertheless, the movement's influence expanded notably during the early 1960s. A symbolic moment of this expansion was the conversion of the prominent American boxer Cassius Clay to Islam in 1964, following his association with Malcolm X. Cassius Clay later adopted the name Muhammad Ali, a development that further increased public awareness of Islam in the United States and underscored the growing socio-religious impact of the movement (Setiawan & Affan, 2019, p. 118).

Despite his prominence within the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X later became disillusioned with its leadership, particularly under Elijah Muhammad, and was temporarily marginalized within the organization. In 1964, he was formally removed from his ministerial position. Subsequently, Malcolm X performed the Hajj pilgrimage, an experience that significantly transformed his religious outlook. During his time in

Mecca, he reportedly recognized limitations in his prior understanding of Islamic ritual practice and theology, including aspects of prayer and religious observance. In contrast to the Nation of Islam, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) represents a more institutionally structured and theologically mainstream Muslim organization. Founded in 1982 and headquartered in Plainfield, Indiana, ISNA emerged from earlier Muslim student initiatives established in 1953. It is widely regarded as one of the largest Muslim organizations in North America, with significant institutional reach, including administrative influence over a substantial number of mosques in the United States and a membership base estimated in the hundreds of thousands (Setiawan & Affan 2019, p. 119).

Although Malcolm X emerged as one of the most influential and effective organizers within the Nation of Islam (NOI), his relationship with the organization's leadership, particularly Elijah Muhammad, became increasingly strained. Scholarly accounts indicate that Malcolm X experienced internal marginalization, including a period of suspension lasting approximately three months. In 1964, he was formally removed from his position as a minister within the NOI. Following his departure, Malcolm X undertook the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, an experience widely regarded in academic literature as transformative in his religious outlook. During this pilgrimage, he reportedly reassessed his prior understanding of Islam and recognized significant limitations in his religious knowledge and practice. Despite his prominent role as a public representative of the NOI, he came to acknowledge gaps in his comprehension of core Islamic rituals, including the correct performance of الصلاة (ṣalāh) and familiarity with supplicatory prayers (duʿāʾ). This experiential encounter is often interpreted as a critical turning point in his spiritual and intellectual trajectory (Setiawan & Affan, 2019, p. 119).

In contrast to the Nation of Islam, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) represents a more institutionally structured and doctrinally mainstream Islamic organization within the United States. ISNA is headquartered in Plainfield, Indiana, and its institutional origins can be traced to Muslim student organizations established in 1953. It was formally constituted as an independent organization in 1982. ISNA is widely regarded as one of the largest and most influential Muslim organizations in North America. It has been reported to have significant institutional reach, including influence over a substantial proportion of mosques in the United States and a membership base estimated in the hundreds of thousands. While such figures vary across sources, ISNA's organizational capacity and institutional visibility remain widely acknowledged in the literature. ISNA also contributes to Islamic intellectual discourse in North America through its publication platforms, including *Islamic Horizons*, the *American Journal of Islamic Studies*, and *al-Ittihad*. Collectively, these publications function as channels for scholarly engagement, community education, and the articulation of Muslim identity within the American sociocultural context.

Many immigrant populations encounter persistent challenges related to assimilation while simultaneously seeking to preserve cultural attachments rooted in language, religion, customary practices, and ethnic identity. In this regard, the Muslim experience in the United States appears to parallel that of other immigrant communities navigating incorporation into a pluralistic society. Empirical outcomes of this dual process have generally reflected a combination of sociocultural integration and upward

socioeconomic mobility, alongside increasing participation in civic and political life, including voting, jury service, advocacy activities, and tax compliance. At the same time, the constitutional framework of the United States—particularly the protections of religious freedom, assembly, and speech—has enabled Muslim communities to establish a substantial institutional infrastructure, including more than 2,000 mosques, several hundred Islamic schools, and numerous Islamic centers across the country.

These institutions serve multiple interrelated functions. They provide spaces for religious worship, facilitate Islamic education, support processes of social integration, and contribute to countering persistent stereotypes and misrepresentations of Islam and Muslim communities in the public sphere. In this sense, Islamic institutions operate not only as religious sites but also as socio-cultural infrastructures that mediate between minority identity preservation and broader societal participation. Overall, the majority of American Muslims appear to maintain their religious identity while simultaneously engaging in processes of cultural adaptation within mainstream American society. This ongoing negotiation reflects a broader structural condition common to immigrant populations, wherein individuals and communities must continuously balance continuity and change in the process of long-term settlement and integration (Moore, 2016, p. 12).

Mosques and Islamic Education in the American Socio-Religious Landscape

The mosque movement began to gain substantial momentum in the mid-twentieth century. The inauguration of the Islamic Center Mosque in Washington, D.C., completed in 1957, marked a significant milestone for both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, signaling the increasing recognition of Islam by Muslim-majority states abroad as a meaningful presence within the American socio-religious landscape. Designed according to high standards of Islamic architecture, the Islamic Center primarily served the diplomatic community in Washington, while also functioning as a central hub for Islamic dissemination and education.

Muslim communities in the United States subsequently established Islamic schools to provide religious education for their children. These institutions typically integrate both secular academic curricula and Islamic religious instruction. In addition to primary and secondary schools, several Islamic colleges and universities have also been established in the United States. Some of these institutions attempt to integrate traditional Islamic scholarship with American higher education curricula, while others focus primarily on Islamic studies and the humanities. Furthermore, some Muslim communities have engaged with the public education system by incorporating elements of Islamic education into public school curricula or by organizing extracurricular activities related to Islam. Despite these efforts, Islamic education in the United States continues to face several challenges, including a shortage of textbooks, a lack of qualified teachers, and persistent negative perceptions of Islam. Nevertheless, there are also significant opportunities and initiatives aimed at strengthening Islamic education at various levels (Aroka et al. 2024, p. 179).

Islamic educational activities in mosques and Islamic centers in the United States are typically conducted on weekends, particularly on Saturdays or Sundays. Many mosques also extend their educational outreach to schools and public spaces in order

to provide instruction on Islamic beliefs and practices, while simultaneously promoting interfaith understanding and tolerance. Mosques and Islamic centers often provide multi-level educational programs for both children and adults, supported by classrooms, libraries, and comprehensive facilities. In some cases, these institutions also include social and recreational facilities, as well as auxiliary services such as grocery stores, restaurants, funeral services, and administrative offices, thereby functioning as multifunctional Islamic socio-economic institutions (Manshuruddin, 2022, p. 129).

In California, two cities with significant Muslim populations are Los Angeles and San Francisco. One of the largest Muslim organizations in the United States is located in Los Angeles, namely the Islamic Center of Southern California. This institution comprises a mosque, media center, educational facilities, publishing offices, and meeting spaces. Meanwhile, in Dearborn, Michigan, the Muslim community maintains at least five mosques, of which two are affiliated with Sunni Islam and three with Shi'a Islam (Setiawan & Affan, 2019. p. 116).

According to Sulaiman S. Nyang, contemporary American Muslims face several major challenges, including the preservation of Islamic identity, the development and maintenance of Islamic institutions, the establishment of a Muslim economic structure, and active participation in American political life (Strasburg, 2023, p. 6). As a minority group, Muslims are expected to integrate into Western cultural contexts, including customs, behavioral norms, cognitive frameworks, moral values, and broader worldviews, while simultaneously maintaining core Islamic principles. This perspective is grounded in the sociological reality of Muslim communities coexisting as minorities within a predominantly non-Muslim American society. Historically, parallels have been drawn with early Jewish communities, which also functioned as both religious and cultural minorities and were required to integrate into broader societal structures while preserving their distinct identities. In this regard, the tension between assimilation and identity preservation remains a central issue within contemporary debates on multiculturalism and national identity (Prayetno et.al, 2023; Vitria, 2023, p. 9).

Identity Negotiation in Islam and the American Creed

American Muslims are required to adapt not only economically and politically, but also emotionally and religiously. Such adaptation implies a shift in Islamic outreach (da'wah) strategies, moving beyond traditional rhetorical preaching toward more dialogical and scholarly approaches grounded in Islamic studies. This includes comparative engagement with classical, medieval, modern, and contemporary Islamic intellectual traditions. In this regard, Islamic outreach in the Western-American context requires highly qualified scholars with strong academic grounding in Islamic epistemology and methodology. Moreover, it necessitates engagement with Western intellectual traditions, including political, economic, and cultural systems, as part of a broader strategy of contextual religious communication (Raihan & Suhendi, 2023; Vitria, 2023, p. 11).

For some American Muslims, tensions may arise between Islamic principles and certain aspects of U.S. law, dominant cultural norms, and contemporary social practices. Elements of popular culture particularly the prevalence of explicit sexual

content, substance use, coarse language, and consumerist values are often regarded as incompatible with the ethical sensibilities of many Muslims, as well as segments of the broader society (Curtis IV, 2009). In addition, a range of Muslim actors, including individuals affiliated with both major political parties as well as more centrist positions, have expressed concerns regarding experiences of domestic discrimination, as well as U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and its broader engagement with violent extremist movements. Within this context, Muslim participation is increasingly embedded within American political life and broader “culture war” dynamics, characterized by intensified debates over the role of government, moral regulation, and foreign policy orientation.

Across the United States, diverse religious, ethnic, racial, and ideological groups similarly articulate dissent in response to perceived policy shortcomings, cultural tensions, or socioeconomic inequalities. Such expressions are typically manifested through constitutionally protected forms of civic engagement, including protest activity, electoral participation, and lobbying efforts aimed at advancing group-specific interests. Accordingly, American Muslims, like other minority communities, actively engage in public discourse concerning moral, socioeconomic, and political issues. This pattern reflects a broader historical trajectory in which various cultural groups seek recognition and rights within a pluralistic democratic system. Although American Muslims do not constitute a homogeneous population, shared religious affiliation often provides an important foundation for institutional development, political mobilization, and identity formation, particularly as communities navigate varying degrees of integration into mainstream American society (Moore, 2016, p. 5).

Instances of discrimination and violence motivated by religious prejudice have affected Muslims, as they have historically affected other religious minorities, including Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and others. At the same time, there is a scholarly debate regarding the extent to which Muslim victimization is generalized or selectively emphasized, particularly given that claims of marginalization may carry political, educational, or economic implications in certain contexts. Empirical assessments, however, often suggest a more differentiated reality. In general, American Muslims demonstrate relatively strong outcomes in socioeconomic, educational, and professional domains and make significant contributions to cultural diversity and the national workforce. Survey data further indicate that approximately 66% of American Muslims consider life in the United States superior to conditions in most Muslim-majority countries, while 90% report positive affective identification as Americans, and approximately 80% express a desire among immigrant Muslims to integrate into mainstream society (Moore, 2016, p. 13).

Conclusion

This research concludes that the Muslim contribution to the formation of United States identity is not a recent phenomenon but a historical process spanning from the era of slavery to the 21st century. The primary findings demonstrate that Islam is an integral part of the American fabric, with historical evidence showing that 10% to 20% of enslaved Africans were Muslim. Through five distinct waves of migration, the Muslim community has transitioned from unskilled laborers to highly educated professionals and intellectuals who have significantly impacted the nation's

demographic, political, and economic sectors. The scientific contribution of this article lies in its "history from below" approach, which recovers hidden narratives and challenges the dominant historiographical assumption that significant Muslim presence only began after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. By documenting the active agency of early Muslims and their establishment of social structures like the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), this study redefines Muslims as active participants in the American narrative rather than a passive minority.

Theoretically, this study enriches the understanding of multiculturalism by presenting American Identity as a "plural mosaic". This concept is specifically defined not as a homogeneous construct, but as a continuous negotiation between core Islamic principles and the "American Creed", which encompasses individualism, democracy, and religious freedom. Practically, these findings imply a need for more inclusive educational curricula and interfaith dialogue to counter persistent negative stereotypes and promote social cohesion in a pluralistic society.

However, this study has certain limitations. The broad chronological scope from the 19th to the 21st century means that certain periods or local grassroots movements outside of major organizations may not have been analyzed in exhaustive detail. Furthermore, the research relies heavily on existing scholarly literature and documented historical figures, which may leave some undocumented "hidden traces" still unexplored. Therefore, the agenda for future research should focus on micro-historical studies of specific Muslim communities in various U.S. geographical regions or the specific roles of Muslim women in early identity formation. Additionally, future studies could explore how digital media and social networks in the 21st century are currently reshaping the negotiation of Muslim-American identity in the face of contemporary global challenges.

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