

**NEH Summer Institute  
American Muslims: History, Culture, and Politics  
July 13-31, 2015**

**Synopses of Presentations**

Morning sessions run from 9:00 – 12:00.

Afternoon sessions run from 2:00 – 5:00.

Evening sessions (when scheduled) run from 7:00-9:00.

All sessions will be held at George Washington University unless otherwise noted.

Sunday, July 12

Day: Participants arrive and check in at George Washington University, Foggy Bottom Campus

5:00-8:00 pm: Group dinner followed by introductions and orientation by project directors

**I. Who Are American Muslims?**

Monday, July 13

Morning: “Muslims in America: An Overview” (Sohail Hashmi, Irene Oh, and Yvonne Haddad)

Hashmi and Oh will open with a summary of the intellectual rationale for convening this summer institute, our goals during the institute and later—especially the website—and end with an outline of the schedule for the coming three weeks.

Afternoon: “Surveying the American Muslim Population” (Besheer Mohamed)

Besheer Mohamed will address the history of quantitative research on American Muslims and the challenges that have confronted researchers. Are there issues unique to this population, or are the challenges common to survey research on religion in America? He will discuss how and why Pew became the leader in surveying Muslims in America and around the world. He will outline the results of the landmark surveys in 2007 and 2011 on the American Muslim population. What are the key findings of this survey? How did these results confirm or challenge previous assumptions, including on some basic issues as the total number of Muslims, their ethnic origins, their educational and income levels, and their attitudes on faith and civic life in America? How do American Muslims compare with Muslim populations abroad that Pew has surveyed? How do they compare with other faith communities in the U.S.? He will also discuss the parallels between quantitative research on American Muslims and the qualitative research that dominates

the field. He will offer suggestions on effective ways to incorporate social science data into college curricula.

Tuesday, July 14

Morning: “Challenges and Prospects in the Academic Study of Islam” (Juliane Hammer)

The academic study of American Muslims in their diverse histories, demographics and contemporary experiences takes place at the intersection of several fields of the academy including Islamic studies, American religions, sociology, anthropology, and political science. Each of these fields brings methodological tools as well as theoretical frameworks and disciplinary histories to this specific subject of study. The result is the emergence of a highly interdisciplinary but also somewhat fragmented subfield in which American Muslims are studied from various angles and with differing results and consequences.

In this presentation I aim to outline challenges and prospects in the field with a focus on the intersections between Islamic studies, American religions, Africana studies and gender studies. My aim is to demonstrate how race and gender as categories of inquiry can meaningfully be employed to explore the lived realities of American Muslims as gendered subjects and diverse members of American society. I demonstrate how our research can take on challenges and open up opportunities for inquiry that enable both further contributions to our understanding of religion in American society and the mutual influences of gender, race and religion in the lives of American Muslims. In order to make my remarks specific I discuss my own research on gender discourses, marriage and sexuality as an example for how challenges play out and what prospects for further research I see.

Afternoon: “Muslims and America’s Multi-Religious Mosaic” (Lucinda Mosher)

America’s multireligiousness has been an object of intense study for the last quarter-century. The multiplicity of religions embraced here—and the internal diversity of most of those religions—is fascinating; and Islam in its many expressions has added significant texture to America’s multi-religious fabric for centuries. The 1965 Immigration Act added significantly to the complexity of the US Muslim population; the events of September 11, 2001, intensified the complexity of American interreligious relations. This lecture will consider American Muslim interreligious engagement from a number of vantage-points. It will explore the ways in which American Muslims organize themselves as coalitions for activism as well as communities of worship and study, the interreligious implications of these various modes of organizing, and the related matter of the need for communal worship spaces—with special attention to instances in which mosque-building has been an interreligious enterprise. It will examine interreligious challenges occasioned by American Muslim civic participation—be that seeking elected office or accepting appointment to a municipal human rights council. It will highlight chaplaincy as an emerging

mode of Muslim leadership that has both Islamic and interreligious expressions. It will consider American Muslim involvement in interfaith dialogue and participation in multifaith councils—thus the relationship of dialogue to interreligious cooperation.

## **II. The African American Muslim Experience**

Wednesday, July 15

Morning: “West African Muslims Enslaved in America” (Sylviane Diouf)

With the help of various illustrations, this session will focus on the Muslim presence in the 18th and 19th centuries. To understand who the African Muslims were, and why and how they became victims of the transatlantic slave trade, Summer Scholars will have read chapter one of *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*.

The session will first examine the diverse manifestations of Islamic practice observed in this country. Examples will come from well-known as well as anonymous Muslims.

The second part will look at community, second generation, perceptions of Muslims by non-Muslims, and relations between enslaved Muslims and non-Muslims. Comparisons will be made to other parts of the Americas where Muslims were present. Examples will include anonymous and famous Muslims in the United States, Brazil, and Trinidad.

Literacy, its manifestations, forms, and uses, will form the third part of the session; which will conclude with the African Muslims’ legacy.

Afternoon: “The Remarkable Odyssey of ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima” (Terry Alford)

My presentation will attempt to portray, through the life of an individual, several dynamics of African-American interaction at the end of the 18th century.

- Islam in Futa Jalon region of present-day Guinea
- State of international slave trade in the 1780s, with introduction to some very fine online resources helpful in understanding the trade and identifying the vessels involved in it
- Effect of American slavery on an Islamic personality
- Ibrahima’s involvement with the abolitionist and colonization movements in the late 1820s.

Thursday, July 16

Morning: “The Nation of Islam and the African-American Journey to Islam”  
(Richard Brent Turner)

This session will discuss African-American Muslim communities in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries with a focus on the Nation of Islam, from its rise in 1930 until the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975. We will analyze the influence of the Moorish Science Temple of America, the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, and Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association on the development of the Nation of Islam. We will also examine the biography and teachings of Elijah Muhammad and the impact of Malcolm X in broadening the base of the Nation of Islam. Finally, we will discuss the rupture between Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam in 1963 and his establishment of the Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the Organization of Afro-American Unity in 1964.

Afternoon: "The American Century and the Making of Black Islam" (Zain Abdullah)

This seminar examines central themes in African American Islam, a Black religious tradition dating back to the fifteenth-century, along with how Black Muslims relate to other groups like newly arrived Muslims from Africa. We discuss, for example, the varieties of African American Islamic Thought, including tensions between Islam as a spiritual system and a charge for social justice. We also explore its anxieties, sobrieties, and the politics over heterodox and orthodox interpretations of the faith. In the end, this session seeks to understand how Black Muslims create a unique array of Islamic traditions, negotiate their identities, and navigate the complexities of a pluralistic America and a globalized world.

Friday, July 17

Morning: Eid al-Fitr – No Meeting

Afternoon: Site visit: The Nation's Masjid, Muhammad's Mosque #4 (Imam Talib Shareef)

### **III. The Immigrant Muslim Experience**

Monday, July 20

Morning: "Arab-American Muslims" (Kambiz GhaneaBassiri)

This presentation will provide an overview of the history of the Arab Muslim presence in America—the reasons for immigration, patterns of settlement in the United States, and the opportunities and challenges Arab-American Muslims have faced in this country, both before and after 9/11. The history of the Mother Mosque of America in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the community that built it will be discussed in some detail .

Afternoon: "The Muslims of Detroit after 9/11" (Andrew Shryock)

Detroit is home to some of the largest, oldest, most diverse Arab and Muslim communities in North America. These communities were well-established politically and economically in 2001, and many people are surprised to learn that, in the years following the 9/11 attacks, Detroit's Arab/Muslim became even more influential, locally and nationally. Despite pervasive scapegoating, government surveillance, and high levels of political uncertainty, the Arab and Muslim populations increased markedly between 2001 and 2011, as did the number of mosques in the city, the number of Arab and Muslim elected and appointed officials, and funding for Arab community and cultural institutions. What fueled these trends, how did people in Detroit interpret them, and what might they tell us about Arab/Muslim citizenship?

I will try to answer these questions in my talk, giving special attention to the local histories and sociopolitical relationships that prepared the Arabs and Muslims of Detroit to respond to the War on Terror in exceptional and effective ways. I will talk about several ordinary people I have worked with in the city -- activists, community organizers, and less politically involved actors -- whose lives reflect over a century of community formation in Detroit. I will show how mosques, non-profits, and advocacy groups are connected to powerful interests in the larger society, and how these connections both protect the Arab/Muslim community and subject it to intense assimilative pressures. This contradictory process, which I call "disciplinary inclusion," is central to Arab/Muslim identity-making in Detroit and elsewhere in the U.S. To show how it works, I will look at recent efforts by anti-Muslim political activists to reinstate the outsider status of Muslims in Detroit. How local media and political coalitions deal with these visitors is revealing of new terms, generous yet still restricting, on which Muslims can be recognized and respected as "fellow Americans."

Evening: Film: *Reel Bad Arabs* (2006)

Tuesday, July 21

Morning: "Immigrants from South Asia" (Karen Leonard)

I will cover the early pioneers, as in both Leonard's and Bald's work, and then the post-1965 immigrants and their children, contrasting the religious landscapes and religious activities for these very different Muslim immigrants. I will also place them in the context of American Muslim mobilizations of the last few decades, again contrasting their experiences and contributions before and after 9/11. The Sikhs will come into the post 9/11 narrative a bit, therefore perhaps justifying one article on the early Punjabis and the ways in which discrimination and common origins tied together members of the two religions back then and perhaps now again.

Afternoon: "Issues Facing American Muslim Women" (Irene Oh and Asma Uddin)

Irene Oh will open the session by providing an introduction to the range of moral and legal concerns salient in discussions of Islam and women. She will then focus on how these broad concerns relate to American Muslim women specifically, as a way of situating Asma Uddin's work with Altmuslima. She will discuss the ways in which women use social media to effect social change.

Asma Uddin will start with her personal story as an American Muslim woman and how that led me to create altmuslimah.com. She will describe altmuslimah – what it is, the issues it covers. She will provide specific examples of issues discussed by its writers; she'll choose examples that tie in with the assigned reading (and will reference the readings as appropriate): Sexuality, marriage, courtship, divorce, Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men; Women's leadership at the mosque – she'll discuss Wadud's women-led prayer, Asra Nomani's efforts, the Mosque in Morgantown documentary (altmuslimah prepared the media kit for that documentary), and related altmuslimah content; Women's physical space in the mosque and the "unmosqued" phenomenon – I'll discuss Maryam Eskandari's architectural work; the Unmosqued documentary; Side Entrance blog, and related altmuslimah content.

Wednesday, July 22

Morning: "American Muslims: A Community of Communities" (Muqtedar Khan)

I will speak about the challenge of internal diversity and multiculturalism within the American Muslim community. What is the impact of racial, cultural and theological diversity on the identity construction of American Muslims. How is the community evolving? I will speak about the new political and cultural trends such as the unmosqued movement, the decline of the hegemony of political Islam the selective embrace of American exceptionalism and the fight against Islamophobia.

Afternoon: Site visit: Islamic Center of Washington, D.C.

#### **IV. American Muslims and American Culture**

Thursday, July 23

Morning: "Insurgent Traditions: U.S. Muslim Cultural Production in the 20th and 21st Centuries" (Sylvia Chan-Malik)

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islam has constituted an insurgent presence in the U.S. racial imaginary. In the post-Great Migration North, organizations such as the Moorish Science Temple and the Ahmadiyya Movement engaged Islam through the spirit of Black nationalism. This rendered Black Muslims domestic racial and religious insurgents in the eyes of the state, a sentiment which reached its peak in the 1960s with the prominence of Malcolm X and Nation of Islam. This presence shifted in the 1970s, as changing geopolitical configurations between the

U.S. and the Middle East introduced the figure of the Islamic fundamentalist— foreign, violent, patriarchal, and fervently anti-American—into national discourse. Then, following the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the figures of the Islamic Terrorist and the Poor Muslim Woman—tropes most closely associated with Arab and South Asian bodies—became ubiquitous in the U.S. cultural landscape. Such examples reveal “Islam” as a racial and religious signifier that has continually traversed boundaries of race and nation to indicate insurgency during the 20th-21st-centuries, a time in which the U.S Muslim population has moved from primarily African American to the nation’s most diverse religious and resolutely transnational community.

My presentation explores the emergence and evolution of U.S. Muslim cultural production from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the post-9/11 era, in particular through musical and literary texts. Accounting for the racial and religious shifts detailed above, I consider the perils and possibilities of “U.S. Muslim/Muslim American/American Muslim” as categories of cultural and literary analysis, and investigate the diverse histories which converge to construct the multivalent meaning of contemporary U.S. Muslim. In particular, I focus on the ways Islam has been mobilized as an expression of cultural protest, and argue that Islam’s “insurgent traditions” enable cultural connections and continuities between and across race and ethnicity in U.S. Muslim communities.

Afternoon: “Islamic Calligraphy in America: An Improbable Art” (Mohamed Zakariya)

Friday, July 24

Morning: “The American Hip-hop *Umma*” (Felicia Miyakawa)

This session will introduce NEH participants to the ways in which Muslim Hip-hop artists have created their own *umma* within popular culture. After outlining a brief history of the relationship between Islam and Hip-hop culture, Dr. Miyakawa will share specific musical and rhetorical strategies Muslim rappers have used to share their faith / way of life; offer praise to Allah; and create and participate in local, national, and transglobal faith communities. Although Islamic rap was most popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it continues to be an important cultural medium for Muslim artists. Dr. Miyakawa will focus in particular on the intertwined history of Hip-hop and the Five Percent Nation and will discuss music by Brand Nubian, Wu-Tang Clan, Rakim Allah, Poor Righteous Teachers, Native Deen, Mos Def, and many others.

The following questions will be touchstones throughout the session:

- How are different interpretations of Islam made manifest in Hip-hop?
- Why is there such a deep connection between Islam and Hip-hop culture?
- Who listens to this music and what impact does it have?
- How is gender represented in Islamic Rap?
- After a period of intense popularity, why did Islamic rap suddenly lose its appeal? What is the current state of Islamic rap?

During the interactive conversation period of this session, Dr. Miyakawa will model ways in which participants can incorporate hip-hop history and rap music into larger discussions of American Islam.

Afternoon: “This Is My Faith, My Voice” (Native Deen)

## **V. American Muslims and American Politics**

Monday, July 27

Morning: “The Recent Rise of American Muslim Politics” (Sohail Hashmi)

This session will focus on American Muslim approaches to and participation in American politics at the local, state, and national levels. Muslims have only within the past fifteen years become active participants in American electoral politics. I will discuss the reasons why historically American Muslims were reluctant to participate, reasons both internal and external to the Muslim population. I will then consider efforts to mobilize Muslims politically beginning in the late 1990s and continuing to the present by focusing on the work of key individuals and organizations. I will review Muslim involvement in the past four presidential elections. The presentation will conclude with a look at the careers of Muslim politicians at different levels and how their experiences illustrate the challenges and possibilities for future Muslim engagement in U.S. politics.

Afternoon: “Islamophobia, Islamophilia, and American Politics” (Carl Ernst)

This presentation will not focus on Islamophobia as an issue of religion, since it actually has a high degree of correlation with ignorance about Islam. Instead, the emphasis will be on questions of citizenship, both legal and cultural, and the relationship between Islamophobia and other forms of racial and religious prejudice toward minority "out groups." Attention will also be directed towards institutional locations of Islamophobia (police, military, political and media outlets) as well as the gender dimension in the conceptualization of Islamophobia.

Evening: Film: *The Muslims Are Coming!*

Tuesday, July 28

Morning: “Muslims in Government” (Rep. Keith Ellison)

Afternoon: “What Do Muslims Want from American Politics?” (Salam al-Marayati)

In order for American Muslims to realize change in US policy, both domestic and foreign, there must be honest and thorough discussions on American Muslim orientation in US politics and their approach to US public opinion. Muslim organizations in the US must deal with foreign

issues, but their orientation must be clearly from the standpoint of working from within the US, not confused to be on behalf of a foreign entity, either governmental or non-governmental. Additionally, in order to change current practices by law enforcement agencies towards American Muslim communities, there needs to be critical analysis on how Muslim organizations respond to law enforcement in particular and the American public in general. At this point, fellow workers, students and neighbors of American Muslims need reassurance that our community is part of the solution to their security worries. What American Muslims do, or more importantly whether they are able and ready to engage in these issues, will determine how influential the community will be in seeking their aspirations within the US political framework.

## **VI. American Muslims in the Global Context**

Wednesday, July 29

Morning: “American Muslims and European Muslims: Comparisons” (Kathleen Moore)

Massive changes of the last century raise perennial questions about identity in a new, radical form. In the age of globalization, with migrations, colonialism and postcolonialism, religions have been deterritorialized. Christianity alone has shifted from being perceived as a Western and Eurocentric religion to being a global and Southern religion within the last century. With respect to Islam, a transnational, deterritorialized understanding of the Muslim religious community has also emerged. According to some, Islam is losing its connection with specific states, and the new reality for Islam involves new possibilities for practicing the religion and for new expression. Moreover, legitimation by reference to classical forms of religious knowledge has become increasingly difficult to sustain. Thus religions (including Islam) are becoming detraditionalized. We have seen the results of these deterritorializing and detraditionalizing tendencies in the modernization of religious identity.

In this session we will explore identity and what continuity with the Islamic tradition, individuality, and integration into western cultural contexts means for Muslims in Western Europe and North America. A new understanding of religious, ethnic and national identity is evolving. We will discuss Muslim identity under conditions of secularity in selected countries. How do we define secularity and how is Muslim identity framed in relation to secularity? What shapes current practices, orientations and identities? Secondly, it can be argued that all Muslim organizations are a product of their specific historical and political frames at the time of their establishment. How has Muslim associational life developed in the United States, the United Kingdom and France? We will look at the circumstances in which major Muslim organizations were established in these countries, because their founding cannot be understood without reference to modern society and the circumstances for religious minorities, and specifically Muslim minorities, in the countries we consider. In this light we will consider Muslim responses to the Islamophobia industry. And thirdly, we often think about Muslims and Islam vis-à-vis Western societies as forming a binary outline of tradition vs. modernity. However, while we

often view Muslim identity and Western culture as monolithic and dichotomous, we rarely see Christian identity and Western culture the same way. Why? In considering that question, we will look at attitudes toward women's equality, violence, sexual freedom, law and justice, and political participation

Afternoon: "American Muslims and the War on Terror" (Cdr. Youssef Aboul-Enein)

CDR Youssef Aboul-Enein, USN will discuss his efforts within the Defense Department to bring a higher and more nuanced level of analysis regarding the complexities of the Muslim World. He will be discussing the reasons he wrote his book, "Militant Islamist Ideology," (Naval Institute Press, 2010) and the role he has played in shaping Defense Department policies and in countering terrorism as an advisor, leader, author, and educator.

Thursday, July 30

Morning: "American Muslims and U.S. Foreign Policy" (Rashad Hussain)

Afternoon: Incorporating this summer institute into the classroom (group discussion)

Friday, July 31

Morning: Presentations by website development teams

Afternoon: Participants depart