Forum

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The arrival of Islam in the United States of America has been dated back to the coming of slaves from Africa. During this unfortunate trade in human cargo from the African mainland, many Muslim men and women came to these shores. Some of these men and women were more visible than others; some were more literate in Arabic than the others; and some were better remembered by their generations than the others. Despite these multiple differences between the Muslim slaves and their brethren from various parts of the African continent, the fact still remains that their Islam and their self-confidence did not save them from the oppressive chains of slave masters. The religion of Islam survived only during the lifetime of individual believers who tried desperately to maintain their Islamic way of life. Among the Muslims who came in *ante bellum* times into America one can include Yorro Mahmud (erroneously anglicized as Yarrow Mamout), Ayub Ibn Sulayman Diallo (known to Anglo-Saxons as Job ben Solomon), Abdul Rahman (known as Abdul Rahahman in the Western sources) and countless others whose Islamic ritual practices were prevented from surfacing in public.[1]

Besides these Muslim slaves of *ante bellum* America, there were others who came to these shores without the handicap of slavery. They came from Southern Europe, the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent. These Muslims were immigrants to America at the end of the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Motivated by the desire to come to a land of opportunity and strike it rich, many of these men and women later found out that the United States of America was destined to be their permanent homeland. In the search for identity and cultural security in their new environment, these Muslim immigrants began to consolidate their cultural resources by building mosques and organizing national and local groups for the purpose of social welfare and solidarity. These developments among the Muslims contributed to the emergence of various cultural and religious bod-

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This is a reprint of Dr. Sulayman S. Nyang's first editoral as it appeared in the *American Journal of Islamic Sciences* 1, no. 1 (spring 1984).

ies among the American Muslims. In the drive for self-preservation and cultural integrity, these Muslim immigrants encountered many problems. There were problems relating to the maintenance of houses of prayer and to the organization of serious men and women dedicated to the upholding of the tradition of the ancestors from the Old World. There were problems relating to assimilation into the American culture and to the selection of mates by Muslim men whose choice of importing a bride from the homeland had almost vanished because of circumstances in the United States of America. Yet, having said all this about the difficulties of the immigrants from the Muslim lands, one can quickly point out that, without denying the historical precedence of the African Muslims of *ante bellum* America, Islam became a reality in American society only after the Muslim immigrants of the Twentieth Century began to exercise their freedom of worship in an America where each and every citizen strongly believes in his right to worship differently. Indeed it was this rendezvous between the followers of Islam and the American destiny that facilitated the gradual planting of the Islamic faith in American soil.

The preaching and planting of Islam have not been identified with only the first and second groups of Muslims. This is because of the fact that a third group of Muslims is now inextricably linked to American history and American society. Who are these Muslims and where do they come from? They are the native born Americans, whites and blacks, who decided to embrace a minority religion in a predominantly Christian country.

Historically speaking, the first native born American Muslim was Muhammad Alexander Russell Webb, a former American consular officer in Manila, Philippines. Prior to his conversion to Islam in 1888, Mr. Webb studied extensively the writings of philosophers and sages from the Orient.[2] Islam apparently struck a responsive chord in his soul and he decided to embrace the teachings of the Qur'an. Writing much later in *Islam in America* (1893), he described his spiritual pilgrimage to Islam and the odds against which he struggled in planting the seed of Islam in America. He started in the same year a publication called the *Moslem World*, which is indeed the mother of all modern Islamic literature in North America.

This American diplomat's conversion to Islam coincided with the arrival of the Muslim immigrants, and it is quite probable that the present Islamic movement owes much to the confluence of the immigrant and native efforts at Islamic Dawah. Regardless of what future historians of the Islamic Movement in America will say, the fact remains that Webb's conversion set the precedence for future White Americans to discover and search for the mean-

ing of life in the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. He also pioneered the Islamic press in America, and Muslim editors of our times cannot but recount events relating to his life with admiration and wonderment. He was truly ahead of his time!

But if Mr. Webb was a man of learning and worldwide travels, who found in Islam the spiritual medicine for an American society troubled by the agonies of the receding Victorian Age, many of his contemporaries and successors who then or later encountered Islam or some form of Islamic teachings were not that fortunate in American life. As history would have it, it was Elijah Poole (later renamed Elijah Muhammad) and his Nation of Islam who would see in Islam not the medicine for salvation of all America but a spiritual and social weapon that could psychologically and emotionally liberate his fellow blacks from the paralyzing grip of racism in American society. To Elijah Muhammad, who was not to be accepted in his lifetime by the mainstream Muslims of the Old World and the New World, Islam was the religion of the Black Man. This teaching of the Nation of Islam was ideologically related somehow to the earlier teachings of Timothy Drew, who is now better known as The Prophet Noble Drew Ali, an Afro-American who preached to his followers a doctrine that traced the history of blacks back to Morocco and the East. Noble Drew Ali did not only claim to be a prophet, but he established temples around the United States and instructed his followers to add the suffix *bey* after their name. A counterpart to this was the adding of the letter *X* after the names of members of the Nation of Islam.

In tracing the history of the development of Islamic ideas in American society, one must point out that two fundamental differences can be discerned between the labors of Mr. Webb on the one hand and the labors of the late Elijah Muhammad on the other. Whereas Mr. Webb was seen as a passing cloud on the American religious horizon, and whereas his movement was never strong enough to justify federal probings of his own activities, the late Elijah Muhammad and his Nation of Islam were widely feared as diabolic forces set to destroy American society. Yet, in identifying the differences between the two postures taken by Mr. Webb and the late Elijah Muhammad, one must hasten to add that the movement of Elijah prepared Malcolm X (later renamed Malik Shabazz) to raise the banner of orthodox Islamism in America. Indeed, from the wider perspective of history, one can argue that it was in Malcolm X (that is, Malik Shabazz) that history, in its game of paradoxes and ironies, brought together the two strands of Muslim thought in America. In Malik Shabazz, there is the unity of thought of the Webbian belief that Islam is the spiritual medicine that could save America

from herself and the Elijahian belief that the Afro-American could only extricate himself by seizing Islam as the antidote to the poison of American anti-Negro racism.

Indeed, regardless of one's view of history, the fact remains that Islam is now a part of the American social landscape. Muslims are in all parts of the country and they contribute in their modest way to the development and growth of American society. In fact many of them have been so fascinated by the *American Dream* that they traveled across the Atlantic and the Pacific to join the native-born Americans in their great quest for the realization and concretization of the American Dream. As I have stated elsewhere, Muslims from the Old and the New World have now decided to embrace the American Dream. It is a challenge to the rest of America; and given the record of the recent past of the United States, one can optimistically say that Muslims will eventually find their own niche within the American society.

But while the Muslim community in the United States thinks about its future and role in the American civilization, its members should be reminded that they belong to a multiracial, multicultural and multinational religious community. Not only are Muslims native Americans who converted to Islam or were born into it, they are also children and descendants of recent immigrants who came from almost all points of the globe. This diversity in the Muslim community has created both unity of hopes and aspirations, and discordances among the variegated islands of interpretations and sentiments.

It is indeed against this background of unity and diversity that this *American Journal of Islamic Studies* (AJIS) is launched to serve as an effective bridge of intellectual communication between the various Muslim intellectuals in the country and beyond. It is also expected to serve as a medium of communication between Muslims in the United States and their fellow countrymen of diverse faiths. Last but not least, it is hoped that such a publication will facilitate the ongoing dialogue and cooperation between Old World Muslims and their brethren living in the West.

To this end, therefore, this first number of the AJIS brings together articles dealing with issues that are of interest to the Muslim World and beyond. The contributors examine the Islamic State in theory and practice, the Lebanese crisis, Ali Shariati, Rashid Rida, Qaddafi, and the Afghan crisis. Dr. Fazlur Rahman and Dr. Javed Iqbal write on the Islamic State. Dr. Rahman examines the concept of Shura in Islam and Dr. Iqbal discusses the nature of the Islamic state. In addition to these two papers, there are papers by Dr. Muhammad El-Khawas of the University of the District of Columbia; Dr. Mahmud Faksh of Duke University; Dr. Muhammad Yadegari of Union College in Schenectady, New York; Dr. Asad Busoool; and Dr. Allen Jones,

a Washington-based consultant to the AID. Dr. El-Khawas' paper is a detailed analysis of Islam in Qadaffi's Libya; Dr. Faksh's contribution looks at the present Lebanese Crisis and offers some interesting observations; Dr. Muhammad Yadegari gives us an analysis of Dr. Ali Shariati's thoughts on the reconstruction of the social sciences. Dr. Busool talks about Rashid Rida's efforts to save the caliphate in Ottoman times. Dr. Allen Jones, who has worked with Afghan groups in Peshawar, Pakistan, offers his analysis of some of the Muslim writings on Afghanistan that are not widely known on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Besides these major pieces in this first issue of the AJIS, there are two book reviews and a short review essay on library science and the Muslim World. The editors hope that the number of book reviews will increase in the future. We also plan to create a section devoted entirely to reports on the state of Muslims around the country. Another section will be created for bibliographic essays and materials.

In concluding this introductory essay, I would like to invite all scholars interested in the Islamic experience in the United States to consider the possibility of writing articles and book reviews for our journal. Islam is a growing reality in American society and, like all the other religious communities in the country, it too deserves some scholarly attention. The AJIS is now the American Muslim response to such a challenge, and we hope that the members of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists and other American scholars interested in the Muslim World would collaborate in the development of this new addition to the world of American scholarship.

S.S.N.
Editor-in-Chief

Endnote

1. See Alan Austin, *African Muslims in Antebelum America: A Sourcebook* (New York/London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984).
2. See Emory H. Tunison, "Mohammad Webb, First American Muslim," *The Arab World*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1945) pp. 13-18.