

History of islam in america



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Islam is the third largest religion in the United States of America, and this is after Christianity and Judaism. Muslims make up close to 1.1 percent of the total population in the US, which translates to over 3.45 million Muslims. The Muslims in America originate from different backgrounds, and this makes Islam one of the most racially diverse religious group in the USA. Close to 50 percent of the Muslims in America are native-born while the rest are foreign-born and close to 86 percent of all Muslims are American citizens. A large number of the native-born American Muslims are African Americans that comprise of close to one-quarter of the total Muslim population. Many converted into Islam in the course of the last seventy years. The conversion to Islam that took place in large cities has led to its growth in the country. Even though Islam has significantly grown in America and has highly impacted Americans, Muslims continue facing religious and race-based discrimination and political interference, which hinder them from becoming fully integrated into American society.

It is not clear as to when Muslims came to the land that would later become America, but Muslims have been in America long becoming a nation. A large number of historians claim that the earliest Muslims came in the early 14th century and were from the Senegambian region. They believe that they were the Moors expelled from Spain who came to the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean islands. However, the makeup of the first wave of Muslim in the United States is clear. Muslim immigrants were some of the earliest arrivals to this land, and they were forcibly transported as slaves during the transatlantic trade. They comprised of African slaves with whom 10 to 15 percent of them were said to have been Muslims. It is also believed that

Muslims came to America more than a century before the founding of the Virginia Company in 1607 by the Jamestown colony. They lived in America long before Protestants and before the existence of Protestantism (Haselby, 2016). After Catholicism, Islam becomes the second monotheistic religion in America. It was difficult for them to maintain their religion as they were forcibly converted to Christianity. They had to keep secret any practice of Islam or their traditional names and clothing. The slave's owners forced them into abandoning their Islamic practices and faith as a way of separating them from their religious and cultural roots and also as a way of civilizing them to Christianity (Khan, 2019). However, there was a group of African Americans who were able to manage their faith until the 20th century.

Muslims formed part of Greater America all the way from the start, and this included those parts of the land that ended up becoming the United States. In 1527, for example, Mustafa Zemmourri, who was an Arab Muslim from the coast of Morocco, came to Florida as a slave on the disastrous Spanish expedition. He survived against all the odds and was able to make a life for himself in America by travelling from the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico all through to the current Southwestern US. He struggled through servitude to natives before he fashioned himself into becoming a respected and a well-known medicine man (Haselby, 2016). Zemmourri ended up being indispensable and provided a facility with native languages that kept men alive and gave them some form of flourishing. This is an indication that Muslims were in America long before it became a nation.

Today, America comprises of a large diversity of Muslims that have immigrated from different parts of the world. A significant number of these

Muslims immigrated to America following the passing of the Immigration Act of 1965. Most of them come from the Middle East and Africa as well as from Southeast and South Asia. The country's diversity is evidenced by its customs, rituals and interpretations that are practised by many Muslim denominations (Khan, 2019). They have made their own cultures, which include comedy and rap. According to Khan (2019), blues music, which is regarded as one of the quintessential forms of the American culture has its roots in Muslim influences from slavery. For example, the famous song "Levee Call Holler" has a melody and style that originates from the Muslim's call to prayer or the 'adhan'. Some Muslims in America also adhere to some global Islamic movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafi and the Gulen Movement, among many others. The country has also gained prominence due to famous Muslims such as Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X. The founding fathers of America like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington explicitly referenced Muslims and viewed them as being potential citizens that had obligations and rights that wasn't different from that of the other Americans. There are over 1500 Islamic mosques and centres all over the county (PBS, 2019). The Muslim converts and immigrants have helped in building America together with the other Americans.

Islam has had a significant impact on American culture. Today, there are many small towns in America whose names are a reference to places in the Middle East. There has also been a large number of melodies and blues of West African Muslims, Muslim hip hop and Jazz artists and rappers. Sufism has also highly influenced a remarkable number of Americans and the popular poet in the USA today is a Muslim known as Rumi. Also, there are

two museums in the USA that have been dedicated to the history of Islamic culture both abroad and in the US and they include America's Islamic Heritage Museum in Washington D. C and the International Museum of Muslim Cultures in Jackson, Mississippi.

Majority of Muslims in America experience a high level of discrimination, which hinders them from becoming fully integrated into American society (PBS, 2019). Muslims are discriminated a lot in the United States, and this discrimination includes being treated with suspicion and also being singled out by the airport security or even being called quite offensive names. Most Americans argue that Muslims in the country are disadvantaged and that being a Muslim in the country hurts one's chances of advancing in American society (Maschi, 2019). Even though they have normalized their religious practices in the country and have also established themselves within the society, Islamophobia and discrimination continue being an obstacle to their true integration. Also, since the attacks of 9/11 Muslims in America have been receiving increased prejudices. After the 9/11 attacks, there has been an increase in the number of hate crimes that are committed against Muslims and most especially those from South Asia and the Middle East. Muslims started expressing fear for their personal safety and that of their families, and they also faced race-based discrimination. A higher proportion of Muslims in the country experience religious and race-based discrimination, and this means they are not fully integrated into society.

They have, however, responded to these discrimination and prejudices by being active in the country's political process and have striven to educate the rest of the Americans about their history and religion. They do not feel

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isolated or marginalized from political participation, and this has made to have a politically proactive stand. Irrespective of their social conservatism, close to 71 percent of American Muslims express their preference for the Democratic Party and they also work very hard to earn a living, albeit their religious background. They have integrated well in American society to the extent that there are some of them that invite interfaith dialogue and have worked towards the achievement of improved relations between the Muslims and the non-Muslims in America. Others work with law enforcers in pointing out those Muslims in the country that are suspected of fostering to intolerant attitudes. As a result, Islam is expected to grow soon and become the largest religion in the country (PBS, 2019).

Muslims in America has highly suffered from political interference. The political right in the USA has exhibited more suspicion on the Muslims and Islam compared to the political left, and a number of media personalities are publicly expressed their hostility towards Muslims. The attitudes of Americans towards Islam and Muslims became a very important subject after the election of President Donald Trump. After the 9/11 attacks, President George Bush assured Muslims that America was not in war with Muslims as the face of terror did not truly reflect the true Islamic faith (Hawley, 2019). His administration, therefore, did not reduce the immigration of Muslims from a large number of Muslim countries, and this is because he believed that all people desire and deserve freedom. President Trump, however, attacked the strategies of Bush and called for a complete ban on Muslim immigration into the USA. Trump believed that terrorism in the USA was predominantly an issue of immigration and that it could only be resolved if

the country admitted fewer Muslims. Even though they wish to uphold the principle of the freedom of religion, most Trump supporters are highly concerned that the increasing Muslim population in the country will end up undermining the unity of America (Hawley, 2019).

In conclusion, American Muslims are Americans just like other Americans, given that they arrived at the land long before the nation was formed. Despite their very complex histories, Muslims in America have learned ways of blending their experiences, which are unique. However, regardless of their struggle to fit into the fibre of American society, Muslims in America experience race-based and religious prejudices and discrimination. The political interference experienced by Muslims in America makes them feel isolated and discriminated, and the prohibition of Muslim immigration into the country increases tension and fear from other Americans towards American Muslims. America upholds the principle of the freedom of religion, and this should not be exceptional for the Muslims who have been part of American history.

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