

Life after September 11

What impact did the destruction of the Twin Towers have on Muslim life in America?

I. Introduction

- A. Defining moment in American history, September 11, 2001
- B. Vulnerability
 - 1. fear and eventually war
- C. Attacks on mosques
 - 1. graffiti, smeared with feces, people being yelled at
 - 2. hate crimes: at times directed against people who were not Muslims, murder of Sikh man in Arizona
 - 3. controversy over Islamic center built near Ground Zero
- D. Increased curiosity about Islam
 - 1. non-Muslims entering mosques for first time

II. Who are these people and why do they hate us?

- A. The invisible minority becomes visible
 - 1. small number of violent acts
 - 2. fear, hysteria
 - 3. all Muslims were terrorists
 - 4. individual cases of support and affection
- B. ejection from the national “we”
 - 1. more subtle negative response: bias, ignorance, stereotype
 - 2. clash of civilizations and “they” are on the “other” side
 - 3. Muslims are indigestible minority
 - a. common in US—Asians, blacks, cannot/will not assimilate
 - b. “they” won’t be like “us”
 - c. Why don’t you just go home?
 - 4. assumption: Muslims are prone to violence
 - 5. suspicion

- a. rumor that Obama was Muslim, and it wasn't a compliment—a “smear campaign”

C. political response

1. Patriot Act, passed October 2001:
 - a. 1200 immediate arrests, held without being charged
 - b. 8000 Muslims interviewed
 - c. detentions, airport profiling
 - d. Feeling “under surveillance”, esp. in mosques
2. stops flow of immigrants, slows down students
3. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan
4. shift of American Muslim voting from Republican to Democrat, 90% Obama (Muslim voted for Bush in 2000)

III. Religious revival

A. Hijacked not only planes but “my religion”

1. American Muslims as shocked by hatred and violence as other Americans
 - a. Reassure public they do not support terrorism, loyal Americans
 - b. Giving of time, money, even blood for victims
 - c. Fatwa (authoritative statement by respected scholars) of prominent North American scholars condemning terrorism and stating why it is prohibited in Islam

“There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism. Targeting civilians’ life and property through suicide bombing or any other method of attack is *haram*—forbidden—and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not “martyrs.” The Qur’an . . . states: “Whoever kills a person [unjustly] . . . it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he has saved all mankind (5:32).”

- d. Response of other Am minority cultures: Japanese during WWII
2. earlier feeling of assimilation, to “blend in” or lack of interest in religion
 - a. association of Islam with “old country”

3. re-thinking importance of religion, spur to piety
 - a. Post 9-11 can there be an authentic Islam in United States?
4. public education
 - a. from community festivals to political positions
 - b. importance of voting
 - c. interfaith activities—support common values
 - d. increases in university courses
 - i. controversy over Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qu'ran*
5. political involvement
 - a. Keith Ellison, African American Muslim elected to congress from Minnesota in 2006 took oath of office on Thomas Jefferson's copy of the Qu'ran borrowed from Library of Congress
 - b. Used his copy of what is sacred
6. with “owning” comes criticism
 - a. Muslims saying communities too lax at allowing fellow Muslims to condemn Jews or to be “easy” on injustices in birth countries
7. “secular Muslims” as with other religious communities—not always prayers, belief in Allah, cultural holidays but also Christmas trees. American “spiritual but not religious”

B. Role of imams widening

1. traditional: legal scholar no “ordination”
 - a. men going to study with certain mosques
 - b. knowledge of Qu'ran and of Arabic (remember: most Muslims do not come from Middle East)
2. US looks differently at religious leaders
 - a. Already pre 9-11 taking on wider roles as “explainers”
3. Post-9-11 Muslims looking more outward to present themselves, correctly, to non Muslim communities
 - a. vigorously denouncing terrorism explaining how not Islamic

- b. moving increasingly to non-Muslim community
 - c. balance between law enforcement and trust of community
 - 4. Divine law directs everyday life
 - a. increasing questions by Muslims trying to live Shariah in complicated US culture: Is it halal, or lawful, to eat a Big Mac? Can alcohol be served, a waiter wonders, if it is prohibited by the Koran? Is it wrong to take out a mortgage, young Muslim professionals ask, when Islam frowns upon monetary interest?
 - 5. Increasing inter-cultural
 - a. imam as mediator, broker
 - b. sorting out problems before they go to the law
 - c. defines doweries, looks at marriage contracts, adjudicates disputes between members
 - d. defining what is Islam and what is cultural
 - 6. Challenges for imams
 - a. Recruited from overseas, where studies Islamic law
 - b. not always prepared to deal with community issues because of culture and language
- C. Young people
- 1. importance of young: in US 29% of Muslims under 30
 - 2. immigrant parents took Islam for granted because closely wedded to culture
 - a. parent's focus is career advancement for children because of parental sacrifice—trying to survive
 - b. parent's assume low profile in religion
 - 3. commitment to America, staying and civic participation
 - 4. youth thinking religion is a choice and if you choose it you should know something about it.
 - a. Increase in interest in education
 - b. Greater participation in mosque life, prayer
 - c. Increase presence in Muslim Student Associations

- d. Establishing Muslim girl scout troupes
- 5. asserting themselves more in school
 - a. asking for time and place for prayer
 - b. stronger resistance to dating, alcohol, mixing of sexes
- 6. Decline in ethnic, sectarian identity towards “Muslim”
 - a. Increases in intermarriage
 - b. Sunni Shia—CAIR poll after elections 1000 Muslims almost 40% said “just Muslim”
 - c. Similar to other religions, “non-denominational” Catholic not ethnic divisions

D. Women

- 1. Looking to Qu’ran and early Islam rather than later codified traditions
 - a. Egalitarian perspective
 - b. Explaining difference: women having no requirement to contribute to economics of family and so do not inherit at same rate as men
- 2. importance of Muslim identity; women wearing hijab
 - a. most US Muslim women don’t wear hijab except in mosque
 - b. what constitutes modesty?

Modesty

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted with all that they do.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their *zeenah* (charms or beauty or ornaments or adornments) except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their khimar (veils) over their bosoms and not display their *zeenah* except to their husbands, their fathers and that they should not strike their feet so as to draw attention to their hidden *zeenah* (ornaments). (24:31-32)

- c. visible sign of religious commitments
- d. alternate to sexually charged America
- e. beyond looks to character, spirituality
- 3. women go to mosques here more than in their birth countries

- a. as mosques become more community centers, women more important positions
 - b. women more visible in mosque and community organizing
 - c. controversy over where women sit, even if separate demanding good sound, clean and bright space
 - d. Toledo mosque, side by side with only low division
4. religiously empowered women “rocking the boat”
- a. how to connect with immigrant/refugee women who are less educated in secular and religious subjects
 - b. how to deal with imams who expect women to be quiet and listen to sermon, but asking to be more aware of religion
 - c. women critical of their own Islam traditions
 - d. women critical of non-Muslim ignorance
- E. reaching out to African Americans
- 1. not always easy relationship, American born, foreign born
 - 2. most racially/ethnically diverse religious community
 - 3. decrease in tension between African American and immigrant as any Islamic marker triggers suspicion
 - a. funding of poor predominately African American mosques by middle-class Muslim immigrants
 - b. political savvy of blacks for fighting for minority rights
- F. increase in converts
- 1. religions of choice (from 2009 Pew Survey)
 - a. half of Americans change religions from the one they had at birth; most before 24; many more than once
 - 2. conversion straightforward: reciting Shahada in front of witnesses
 - 3. Increase in information on Islam since 9-11
 - a. Intense, communal, intellectual faith with long history
 - b. Conservative on sexuality, family
 - c. 38% interest from literature on Islam (2001 Georgetown stats)
 - d. 22% from other Muslims

4. Women marrying Muslim men
 - a. 13% from marriage
 - b. Concern for children to receive proper education
5. converts in prisons
 - a. from days of Malcolm X: ordered, meaningful lives; high number of African Americans

IV. Conclusion

- A. Islam is “on the map” positive and negative
- B. More focus on beliefs and rituals by American Muslims
- C. Struggles to bridge different groups within Muslim community