Blacks, the WOI Theory, and Hidden Transcripts

Samory Rashid

Abstract

This study offers a rare glimpse into the often hidden world of Islam and Muslims in the Americas as told from the perspective of an indigenous black Muslim born and raised in the United States. In addition to providing a theoretical and methodological critique of the Waves of Immigration (WOI) theory, the dominant theoretical perspective governing studies of Islam and Muslims in the Americas, this study also offers an alternative theoretical perspective designed to provide a more accurate and thorough portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the Americas.

Introduction

According to *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Esposito 1995), of the "three to four million adherents in the United States today … roughly a third of the Muslims in continental America are African Americans." Stone's study in *The Muslims of America* (Haddad 1991) estimates that African Americans are 30 percent of the American Muslim population. A Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) mosque study (CAIR 2001) also estimated African Americans to be 30 percent of the American Muslim population. Yet despite their significant numerical presence, African American Muslims have been marginalized in the literature on Islam in the United States. For example, except for Aminah McCloud's *African American Islam,* to my knowledge no other major study has been published on mainstream (i.e., Sunni) Islam that has been written by an African American Muslim. Only a very small number of studies have been written by African Americans (e.g., Turner, Marsh, and possibly Barboza).

Samory Rashid is an associate professor of political science at Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana.

This is especially tragic when one considers that at over one million strong, African Americans constitute the largest Muslim minority among Muslims in the United States.

According to the WOI theory, Islam was first introduced by enslaved Africans but failed to take root in the United States. Thus, Islam was not permanently established until 1893, when Alexander Russel Webb established the first mosque in North America. Subsequent to this, immigrant Muslims extended Webb's initial efforts by permanently establishing Islam in this country during the twentieth century.

In recent years, prominent studies by Austin (1984), Diouf (1998), Quick (1996), Turner (1997), Muhammad (1999), Afroz (2000), Dannin (2002), and Lotfi (2002) have provided new grounds for challenging the assumptions of the WOI theory by definitively documenting the survival of mainstream Islam among blacks throughout the Americas. Yet unanswered by these studies is the lingering question of whether the type of Islam first introduced by Africans is the same mainstream Islam practiced by African Americans. It is my contention that the Islam practiced by African Americans today does not, by and large, come from immigrants, but rather from the tradition of Islam in black America first introduced by enslaved Africans.

This study is in three parts. The first part establishes the historical and numerical importance of African American Muslims, the second part offers a brief examination of the WOI theory, and the third part develops the hidden transcripts theory as an alternative to the WOI theory. Included therein is an example of how the hidden transcript theory illuminates history in a way that the WOI theory cannot.

African American Muslims

Although Muslims in the United States are usually associated with Arabs, an American Muslim is more likely to be African American than an Arab.[1] This fact is obscured by the way statistics on American Muslims are routinely grouped, with Saudi, Iraqi, Egyptian, and other Arab Muslims pooled into a single broad category of "Arabs," just as Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi Muslims (are classified as "South Asian," regardless of their country of origin). African/black Muslims from various countries, (e.g., the United States, Nigeria, Senegal, or Somalia) are almost never pooled or grouped in this way. As a result, their number as a percentage of the total Muslim population in the United States is consistently underestimated and, therefore, underrepresented.[2]

The question may arise as to who I mean by "African American Muslim." Quite simply, I mean black Muslims born in the United States. I am not talking here about black immigrants. In fact, the whole immigrant-indigenous typology comes from the WOI theory, not from me. The important concern here is nationality. Simply put, blacks are the largest nationality of Muslims in this country. I prefer to think about Muslims through the prism of nationality, for it is a much clearer concept.

Black Africans have played a pivotal role in Islam since its very beginning. The first *muezzin* of Islam was Bilal, a black African man. Some writers, like Montgomery Watt, argue that Bilal may have been the first person outside Prophet Muhammad's family to embrace Islam. The Prophet's only adopted son was Zayd bin Harith, a former slave. Islam was practiced in Africa for more than a thousand years before it arrived in the Americas via slavery.

Sylviane Diouf and Sultana Afroz both argue that enslaved Africans played an important role in bringing Islam to the United States. The first enslaved people in this country were from Spain. These Spanish-speaking slaves were crypto-Muslims of African descent seeking to escape from Spain and the Spanish Inquisition.[3] Diouf claims that "… far from making the African religious fervor disappear, slavery deepened it."[4] Muslim slaves hailed from such prominent African ethnic groups as the Hausas, Fulanis, Wolofs, Mandingos, Senegambians, as well as Muslims from "Guinea," and those loosely described as either "Moors" or "Turks." Therefore, the history of Islam in the United States cannot be separated from black Africans. This history, especially prior to the twentieth century, has been ignored by WOI theory proponents throughout the Americas.

When nationality is used to refer to a person's country of origin, African Americans represent the single largest and oldest Muslim nationality in the United States. Yet, because definitions are not consistently applied in the literature on Islam in this country, misleading images of Muslims are often conveyed. Several major studies estimate black Muslims to be 30 percent of the estimated total of American Muslim population.[5] However, African American scholars like Ali Mazrui offer higher estimates. According to him, 42 percent of all American Muslims are black Muslims.[6]

If blacks constitute one-third of all American Muslims, this means that they number at least 1 million, if you believe the low-end estimates of a total of 3 million American Muslims often given by WOI theorists. Haddad cites a similar estimate of 3 million Muslims in her *Muslims of North America* study. Perhaps reflecting the subjectivity of such estimates, Larry Poston's

chapter in Haddad's *Muslims in America* (1991) estimates that there are 2 million black Muslims. I do not know of any other Muslim nationality (i.e., Jordanians, Egyptians, Saudis, Indians, or Pakistanis) who are described in the literature as numbering 1 or 2 million. In addition to this, events since 9/11 would lead most people to believe that Muslim immigration to the United States over the past 2 years has not increased dramatically and has probably decreased. Meanwhile, black "converts" to Islam, as Danin asserts, continues to account for "90% of all Muslim converts in the U.S."

Long-time observers of the American Muslim population's estimated size often find such estimates amusing. For instance, in response to the frequent questions regarding the number of Muslims in this country, Malcolm X was fond of saying in the1950s and 1960s : "Those that say do not know, and those that know do not say." This statement is still true today.

Given this background, it seems reasonable to ask why American Muslims are so consistently depicted as either foreigners or immigrants, while African American and other indigenous Muslims, including Latinos/Latinas, Anglo, and Native American Muslims remain virtually invisible to the public. I believe that Muslims are consistently depicted as foreigners and immigrants due the climate of fear that presently exists. Since the public is afraid of foreign and immigrant Muslims, it is they, rather than indigenous Muslims, who attract the most attention. In addition, most Americans, even Muslim Americans, are unaware that Africans were the first to introduce Islam to the Americas centuries before the establishment of the United States as a nation.

A personal drama with a Pakistani colleague's family illustrates this point. A colleague's wife once embarrassed me when, consistent with Islamic etiquette (*adab*), she refused to shake my extended hand at a dinner party that included both Muslim and non-Muslim guests. Dramas like these are easy enough to accommodate. But when the woman's daughter, a young well-educated professional at the same party innocently asked me "What prison were you in when you converted to Islam?" it became abundantly clear to me that even well-educated, well-intentioned Muslims could benefit from greater awareness of African American Muslims.

My colleague's daughter never considered the possibility that I might have a background similar to her father's, who is now deceased, even though her father and I both worked for the same academic institution as college professors. This encounter reminded me that sometimes progress moves at a "two steps forward, one step backward" pace. By this, I mean that just as it took nearly 30 years for the public to appreciate the value of

Malcolm X, an ex-convict and African American Muslim martyr, it may take additional years before others fully realize that all African American Muslims are not ex-convicts.

Before moving to the next section, a final word is in order concerning the authenticity of Islam among blacks in the Americas. The question of Islamic authenticity among blacks in Africa and throughout the African diaspora has long been recognized and challenged by scholars and practitioners alike. Diouf's pioneering study, *Servants of Allah*, acknowledges how the practice of viewing Islam as an exclusively Middle East Arab religion ignores its role as an African religion and obscures an important aspect of Islam in this country.[7] Nevertheless, like nearly all WOI theorists, Diouf believes that Islam among Africans, African Americans, and blacks – whatever one prefers to call them – failed to survive.

Daniel Pipes also raises the question of whether blacks are legitimately Muslim in his *Militant Islam Reaches America* (2002.) Pipes agrees with Diouf that although there are some signs of lingering Islamic influence, it failed to survive. Thus, he calls the idea of a surviving legacy of Islam among blacks "romantic." Diouf, on the other hand, believes that such an idea is "ironic." Comments by Smith and Haddad also imply that black Muslims may not be authentic in that some black Muslims "claim" an identification with Islam. The dust jacket to Robert Dannin's book includes comments of praise from Smith and Haddad.[8] In this praise, they refer to his subjects as activists and ex-slaves seeking redemption from society. But not once are these subjects referred to simply as Muslims. This is a consistent pattern in Haddad's and other's works. Thus, according to this perspective, there is no such thing as a surviving legacy of Islam among blacks in America.

The WOI Theory

Under the heading of "Islam in America," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, edited by John Esposito, outlines the following views of the WOI theory:

> Perhaps as much as one-fifth of the Africans brought in the slave trade were Muslim. At first they might have attempted to practice their religion, but most were forced into conversion to Christianity. ... The virtual disappearance of earlier African Muslims in America because of intense persecution has been reversed in the twentieth century. ... This first "wave" … of immigration continued until World War I, after which

> a second wave continued through the 1930s, ending with World War II. A third wave of Muslim immigration after World War II included many people from the elites of Middle Eastern and South Asian countries seeking education and professional advancement. A fourth wave of Muslim immigration to North America began in the mid-1960s and continues today.[9]

Reflecting a similar point of view, Daniel Pipes, a pro-Zionist appointed to the quasi-governmental Institute of Peace by President George W. Bush, agrees with Diouf, who asserts that "not one community currently practices Islam as passed on by preceding African generations."[10] Contrary to this view, however, African Americans belong to many Islamic groups throughout the United States and are visible worshippers in most of the major groups that organize the *jumu`ah* prayer. These include the American Muslim Mission (AMA), formerly led by Warith Deen Muhammad, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA). Most contemporary African American Muslims trace their Islamic practice to the religion of their ancestors and, therefore, refer to themselves as reverts rather than converts.

But Pipes, whom one *Washington Post* book review describes as harboring a "hostility to contemporary Muslims," dismisses this view as "romantic."[11] Another proponent of the WOI theory, Sulayman Nyang, describes what he calls "the 60 year gap" (c.a.1870-1930) in which Islam is assumed to have disappeared from practice among African Americans.[12] In his view, "no institutions were created by the enslaved Africans and their descendants." He notes that, "To the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence of any African Muslim slave family that survived slavery and maintained Islam as a way of life. This is why I call this period the 60 year gap between the African Muslim slaves and the African-American Muslims of this [20th] century."[13] For Nyang, "[t]he repressive nature of slavery, especially the peculiar institution of the American South, made it virtually impossible for any form of institutional Islam."[14]

In a 2003 article that appears online as a courtesy of the Foreign Policy Institute, entitled: "America and Islam Go Way Back," Philip Jenkins of Pennsylvania State University writes that "the Islam that was brought vanished quickly, it being difficult to keep up. ... So we have to be suspicious about some claims that are made about this [North American] part of the world. Things were different in South America, and in Brazil, where there were Muslim slave rebellions through the nineteenth century."[15]

Even popular novelist James A. Mitchner has expressed similarly pessimistic views supporting the WOI perspective. In a book review of Alex Haley's *Roots*, he dismisses the idea of an Islamic legacy among blacks as "an unjustified sop at contemporary developments rather than a true reflection of the past."[16] Koszegi and Melton also observe: "In North America that first wave [of Islam] was largely obliterated by the rigors of slave culture" and conclude by noting that "[a] new beginning for Islam then occurred with the career of Muhammad Alexandar Russell Webb, an American convert who founded the first mosque in North America in 1893 in New York."[17]

Gutbi Mahdi Ahmed, a past president of ISNA offers a further pessimistic assessment of the prospect of a continuous Islamic legacy:

> Islam first came to America very early (before Columbus with the slave trade and in the last century), but its arrival was in staggered waves, each time fading before it was solidly grounded. Whenever the second Muslim generation assumed the leadership and it seemed possible for Muslims to be integrated into American society, a new wave of fresh immigrants overtook the older wave. The Islamic presence was again a foreign presence of first-generation immigrant Muslims. Even when large numbers of indigenous Americans embraced Islam, they were unable to assume leadership of the Islamic movement and even failed to integrate into it. Nor could the immigrant Muslim[s] merge into the growing indigenous Muslim community.[18]

Authors that avoid the use of absolute terms while assessing the prospect of an Islam legacy in the United States promote what might be called a "soft" WOI perspective. Such authors as Ahmed, who promote the soft perspective, use terms like "virtual disappearance," "virtually impossible," "failed to take root," "faded" before becoming "solidly grounded," and "largely obliterated." By contrast, authors like Mitchener, who promote a hard WOI perspective, are more definitive in their rejection of a continuous Islamic legacy in the United States, and use absolute terms like "vanished quickly," became "obliterated by the rigors of slavery," "failed to survive," and "unjustified sop." But soft or hard, the message of the WOI theory remains clear: Early Islam in the Americas did not survive according to this perspective. The Islam in the Americas today (including that of contemporary African American Muslims) derives from twentieth century Muslim immigration rather than from the earlier indigenous Muslims or their descendants.

Yet this, on its face, contradicts Ahmed's observation that indigenous American Muslims "failed to integrate into it [the Islamic movement]. Nor could the immigrant Muslim merge into the growing indigenous Muslim community."[19] Could it be that two, rather than merely one, Islamic legacies exit in the Americas? If so, then a viable fix for what appears to be the misapplication of the WOI theory might be to limit its applications in the future to the *immigrant* experience, as opposed to the very different *indigenous* Muslim experience in the Americas. But even if this is a viable "fix" for the problem, the indigenous Muslim experience still awaits a more thorough treatment by objective and, at the very least, more sympathetic scholars.

The WOI theory, however, is rather problematical. For example, in their search for evidence consistent with their preconceived worldview, WOI theorists limit their historical gaze to the twentieth-century United States, the primary destination for most Muslim immigrants to the New World. But because black Muslims have lived in the Americas since 1502 and quite arguably longer, nearly 4 centuries of Islamic history involving blacks are routinely ignored. Proponents of this theory also are notoriously sloppy in their use of language. For example, they routinely fail to distinguish between the United States and other sites of early Islam in the Americas, such as Brazil, Haiti, and Jamaica. As a result, generalizations like those that Esposito and Haddad treat as truisms applying to all Muslims in the United States are often only applicable to immigrant Muslims in this country.

Some writers are so accustomed to communicating in this way that their generalizations about Islam and Muslims in the United States would be unintelligible if their audiences were not already aware that they were referring to immigrant, rather than to all, Muslims in the United States. Esposito's statement that "The Muslim world is no longer 'out there.' The Muslims are our neighbors, colleagues, and fellow citizens …" is a case in point.[20] He clearly did not have indigenous black Muslims in mind when he made this over-generalization, because most blacks, despite their long history in the Americas, are not, by and large, the neighbors, colleagues, or perceived fellow citizens of whites or Muslim immigrants. Perhaps what Esposito really had in mind were the Muslims who he considers "real" Muslims, rather than sectarian or separatists merely "claiming an identification with the religion of Islam," as he and his colleagues Haddad and Smith describe.[21]

Proponents of the WOI theory cannot explain why conversion/reversion to Islam among African Americans continues to outpace Muslim

immigration as the leading cause of Islam's growing number of adherents in the United States, or how blacks could retain *any* idea of Islam, however imperfect, when most blacks in the early twentieth century were poor, uneducated, and lacking in formal Islamic knowledge – were it not for a legacy. Nevertheless, Islam continues to be the fastest growing religion in the United States and Africa, as well as in the world, with African American conversion accounting for some 90 percent of all Islamic conversions in this country.[22]

The WOI theory promotes a serious inaccuracy in its implied assertion that religiosity diminishes and recedes under conditions of prolonged group persecution. In fact, empirical reality suggests that exactly the opposite phenomenon occurred in the United States. The experience of Islam among blacks in the Americas actually strengthened, rather than wilted, under the weight of persecution. Evidence of this is widely accepted, as it relates to the black church. Yet a similar experience, one that exists among blacks who embrace Islam and other non-Christian religious practices like Santeria, is rarely acknowledged. Dannin labels these phenomena "unChurched" religious influences.[23] These unchurched religious influences are still visible in black Masonic lodges, storefront mosques, ghettos, plantations, prisons, barrios, and remote Maroon enclaves far removed from the gaze of white, immigrant, and official mainstream authorities.

Just as some Native Americans were able to preserve traditional culture from what most would consider genocide, Islam, as an element of African culture, would likewise survive despite slavery, Jim Crow, and discrimination. As an element of African culture, Islam would survive alliances between blacks and Native Americans, alliances that allowed blacks to live in separate, though closely linked, communities within well-known Indian territories and swamp regions located in Virginia, the Carolinas, Alabama, and Florida.[24] Similar communities containing well-known Muslim groups and their descendants are found throughout Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.

Diouf reminds us that "Christianity became a relevant and important feature in the existence of Americans of African descent only in the nineteenth century, and singularly so after Emancipation" in 1863.[25] If Diouf and the WOI theory are correct, then the practice of Islam and its institutions, in effect, vanished after being practiced by blacks for 1,000 years in Africa and roughly 350 additional years (1502-1863) in the Americas. However, this theory fails to explain how this sweeping conclusion was reached. Most scholars simply assume its validity without ever applying

any strict empirical tests. Similarly, such scholars as Diouf and Nyang merely point to the seeming absence of visible displays of Islamic practice or institutions in the United States and conclude that early Islam essentially vanished.

It is significant to note that few, if any, proponents of the WOI theory are African American Muslims with direct links to the community or culture that they believe has died. Thus, how would they know whether early Islam in the United States failed or not? Do they speak the community's language, form part of it, live in it, and have direct access to it? Moreover, do they understand the community and would they be able to recognize Islam's practice among its inhabitants in light of the fact that, historically, it has been hidden from public view in a conscious and deliberate attempt to facilitate its survival?

Might the deliberate effort to conceal Islam among African Americans help explain why whites, non-Muslims, and immigrants have such difficulty detecting it? If empirical observation is the hallmark of scientific analysis, then on what basis can WOI theorists legitimately claim that Islam among blacks has totally, moderately, or even minimally vanished? Was this vanishing actually observed, or has Islam's hidden practice been misconstrued by WOI theorists?

Answers to the above questions are best provided by two distinct groups of observers: actual members of the community or communities in question (i.e., black Muslims) and those granted direct access to black or other indigenous Muslim experiences.

Hidden Transcripts

It is no coincidence that recent pioneering studies on Islam in the United States have chipped away at the WOI's theory untested and nonempirical assumptions. In contrast to WOI theorists, these authors display varying degrees of access to the hidden transcripts of Islam in the Americas. Works by Diouf, Quick, Turner, Lotfi, Afroz, Muhammad, and Dannin provide important new insights into this country's Islamic legacy.

Before integration emerged in the 1960s, social norms, economic disparities, and even local laws separated black and white American communities. Segregation placed outside observers of Islam at a distinct disadvantage, for white and immigrant observers were almost completely cut off from blacks. Even non-Muslim black scholars faced serious obstacles in gaining access to Muslim gatherings and groups.

However, the WOI theorists' appropriation of black cultural products, such as claims to the legacy of Islam in this country, is nothing new. In fact, today this appropriation is so blatant that young entrepreneurs of black hip-hop culture go to great lengths to make it difficult for nonblack outsiders "to copy" this lucrative black art form. Black originators of black bebop cultural products mounted similar campaigns in the 1940s. But for producers of black hip-hop culture, keeping a step ahead of the appropriators of black cultural products is not just a matter of black pride – it is a matter of business necessity.

Academic scholarship displays few, if any, resemblances to business competition in the hip-hop business market. But if the subject of Islam and Muslims continues to be of intense public interest and, therefore, of growing market value, then, like the hip-hop industry, the prospects of opportunists emerging to appropriate further cultural products, despite their tenuous legitimate ties to such products, is bound to increase considerably. If this occurs, then setting the record straight about Islam and Muslims will no longer be just a matter of intellectual debate. Rather, it will become a matter of political and cultural necessity in the ongoing battle to win the hearts and minds of Muslims around the world.

For blacks, the current debate over Islam's true legacy comes on the heels of perennial battles with the dominant society over the right of blacks to be treated as human beings endowed with a history, culture, and recognized contributions to society. But in the post-9/11 climate, the demonization of overseas Muslims and anti-immigrant sentiments, using the WOI theory as an explanation for the centuries-long experience of indigenous black Muslims in the Americas seems easier to debunk and is more difficult than ever to accept. In fact, this theory is more vulnerable than it has ever been before.

If Christianity could survive the Iron Curtain, then Islam could most certainly survive the so-called Cotton Curtain among black Muslims in the Americas. If Christianity could survive for nearly a century under brutal communist rule in such places as the former Soviet Union, for nearly 50 years in Cuba and under various authoritative Muslim governments (e.g. Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Indonesia, and Afghanistan), then Islam among blacks could survive in the Americas.

The arbitrary methodological approach of ignoring evidence of Islam in the Americas before the twentieth century and beyond the geographic pale of the American and English colonies projects an incomplete, and therefore false, image of Islam and Muslims in the Americas. It ignores the

roots of Islam in the Americas, especially in the United States, and marginalizes the very people most responsible for successfully, though perilously, delivering it in the first place. Hence, the WOI theory is a creature of its own methodological narrowness and, as a theoretical device, cannot explain important recent trends that have been underway among American Muslims for over a decade.

James Scott's hidden transcripts theory represents a viable alternative theory,[26] for it is well equipped to capture the subtle and decidedly secret quality of mainstream Islam among American blacks. The ability to recognize the survival of Islam in the Americas depends upon one's access to Islam's underground, backstage, and subversive domain (the "hidden transcripts"). Blacks have always had access to this backstage domain. It is a familiar place to them, because it is a place far removed from outsiders, one in which blacks have been forced to live. Islam survived for centuries and often flourished in these remote black domains.[27] However, most nonblack Muslims are largely unaware of them.

Dannin, author of *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, is only one of a relatively small number of white, non-Muslims afforded personal access to black and often highly secluded Muslim communities. His personal access to what I call the "hidden transcripts of Islam in America," afforded him access to several Muslim communities, including those led by El-Hajj Wali Acram of Cleveland, Ohio; Sheik Daoud Ghani, black leader of the Islamic community of West Valley, New York; and Imam Salahuddin, black leader of the Sankore Masjid at the New York State Penitentiary at Stormville, New York. Such communities are routinely ignored by WOI theorists, despite their importance in documenting the black Islamic legacy in the Americas.[28]

Political and religious organizations also document the presence of black Muslims in the Americas. For example, White describes the presence of black Muslim members of the American Propaganda Islamic Movement, which was established by Budruddin Abdulla Kur, a wealthy Muslim from Bombay, to spread Islam among the uneducated American masses in 1873. "By 1891 every major city in the United States had branches of this group."[29] According to White, "by 1900 the organization had several hundred followers throughout the nation" although control of the group remained in the hands of foreigners.[30] By 1913, "Praying Moors" within Noble Drew Ali's Moorish American movement provided additional evidence of a surviving legacy of Islam among American blacks. By 1916, Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which contained a significant number of black Muslims, also had emerged.[31]

These episodes of mainstream Islam among black Muslims, introduced by White, contradict Nyang's idea of a "sixty year gap" and challenge the assumptions of the WOI theory. According to White, "[b]y 1830 the majority of African Americans had lost their practice and understanding of and belief in Islam. It was not until the early twentieth century that Islamic practices resurfaced among various African American groups."[32] White's view no doubt reflects a soft WOI perspective, for it avoids the claim that Islam among blacks had entirely vanished. But an automatic, near knee-jerk WOI mindset in the literature on Islam in this country suggests that like White, others may be guilty of actually challenging, rather than supporting, the perspective they claim to endorse.

On a more positive note, while the struggle against abolitionism (of slavery) was an important element in American history, Africans had already adopted institutional remedies to resist it long before their arrival in the Americas. For example, a series of Tukolor Muslim jihads first emerged (c.a. 1769-76) to establish a series of anti-slavery Tukolor states (c.a. 1818-81) to check the spread of Muslim enslavement in West Africa.[33] The enslavement of African Muslims in the Americas was, in part, the result of indigenous African Muslim struggles (jihads). But in their haste to shift blame for New World slavery from Americans to Africans, apologists selectively overlook these facts in an attempt to appear knowledgeable (if not genuinely concerned) about black history.

Ironically, Muslim jihads against slavery also helped promote political instability, which resulted in scores of African Muslim jihadists being enslaved and transported to the Americas. Indeed, the African civil wars that American historians allude to during the time of the Atlantic slave trade were more accurately Muslim jihads that delivered mostly male Muslim jihadists to the New World. Enslaved African Muslims transplanted Islamic political ideology and the institutions of jihad, *hijrah*, and ummah to the Americas – transplants that survive to this day. These three Islamic institutions of flight-separation (*hijrah*), struggle (jihad), and community (ummah) represent significant themes in the indigenous Muslims' experience in the Americas. The collective and continuous history of black Muslim resistance against slavery, Jim Crow, and American oppression is what I have called the "hidden jihad in the Americas."

As for Diouf's claim that no communities linked to these Africans exist today, Florida offers ample evidence to refute this assertion. For instance, St. Augustine, North Americas' oldest European city, continues to exist, including its large black section known today as Lincolnville (formerly Africville).

Another large black settlement on the Manatee River on the present site of Brandonton, Florida, was known as Angola before it was destroyed. According to Rivers, "one white party also referred to it as the "sarrazota," meaning "Runaway Negro plantation."[34] Present-day Sarasota, located near this site, remains very much in existence today. African and Indian Maroons from the area they called Musa helped form the original nucleus of the nearby town of St. Augustine. Spaniards from Cuba brought skilled black builders with them in 1653 to erect that city's earliest structures. Some of these structures are still standing and remain popular tourist attractions.

Eventually, blacks, some of whom were Muslim, would populate other nearby cities of modern-day Florida. The twentieth-century black migration to the urbanized North would bring such quasi-Islamic leaders as Noble Drew Ali (North Carolina) and Elijah Muhammad (Sandersville, Georgia) north in search of jobs and respite from Klu Klux Klan terrorism. These migrants gave birth to such people as Wallace D. Muhammad and Malcolm X, both of whom would later help lead the mass adoption of Sunni Islam by black Muslims after 1975. But some, like members of my own family and that of Harry Dean, had already begun adhering more strictly to Sunni Islam long before 1975.[35] In fact, one member of my own family appears to have begun studying and practicing Islam as early as the 1940s, an event that encouraged my own acceptance of Islam in the late 1960s. Others, like Cornelia Bailey, a descendant of Muhammad Saleh Bilali of Sapelo Island, Georgia, discovered that what she had inherited from her family was Islam. She became aware of this after reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

But perhaps the strongest evidence for the surviving legacy of Islam among blacks in the Americas is the case of Osman, "king of the swamp" and "the protector of escaped slaves," described by Leaming (a white American and one-time follower of Warith Deen Muhammad) in his pioneering *Hidden Americans: Maroons of the Virginias and the Carolinas*. Leaming speculates that Osman may have been named after Umar, the second caliph of Islam, or Usman dan Fodio, the famous jihadist and slave liberator in what is today northern Nigeria. He describes Osman as a "Muslim" from a family that had been "zealous adherents of the Fulani-led revival of Islam and Holy War against infidelity and the oppression of the poor." From his base deep within Virginia's Dismal Swamp, Osman led a military force of Muslim and non-Muslim Maroons against Confederate forces from 1852-62. Osman's Maroons formed a military alliance with the American government forces, liberating relatives and fellow Muslims from enslavement on nearby plantations.[36]

A History of Jihad in the United States

The WOI theory blinds us to significant aspects of American history. The alternative theory I am proposing, that of hidden transcripts, illuminates otherwise obscure aspects of the past. For instance, although the black church is often considered the heart of black resistance and the standard-bearer for social protest movements against discrimination, existing evidence suggests that the Islamic influence has been at least as influential. There is a history of jihad in America by Muslim slaves seeking freedom and justice.

Slave notices for runaway or fugitive slaves frequently disclosed the ethnic background of fugitives. Many came from Muslim ethnic groups (or if you like, tribes). Many with names like Musa, Ibrahim, and Akbar were identifiably Muslim. Others like the Yoruba and Coromantees contained smaller, though no less significant, Muslim jihadists. Some, like Omar bin Said, memorized the Qur'an in Arabic by heart.[37] According to Landers, others met in private homes. For example, in 1784, one man in St. Augustine, along with his countrymen, practiced "rites in the style of Guinea" that would appear to be Islamic.[38]

In 1726, Spain founded the earliest free black town in North America for escaped slaves from the Carolinas. These fugitives agreed to become nominal Catholics and Spanish allies against their former English, and later American, slave masters. Variously described as Fort Mose, Fort Moosa, and the Negro Fort, the fort's actual name was Musa. This name appears to have come from African and Indian refugees already living in the area.[39] Spain exercised only nominal authority over it, as its residents still managed to display elements of their African and Indian cultures and practices. Musa, the Muslim name for Moses, connotes deliverance from bondage and slavery.

This fort, which played a vital role in the Spanish defense against the British, was led throughout its intermittent history by a Mandingo African captain and corsair, whose Christian name was Francisco Menendez.[40] Mandingos were well-known in Africa and the Islamic world as world traders and travelers, fearless warriors, and fervent Muslims. Much work remains to be done in excavating the archeological site currently underway just 2 miles north of present-day St. Augustine. The quasi-independent status of Fort Musa and other similar settlements appear to have enabled Muslims within them to practice their religion freely. Other Maroon settlements like Musa among the Native Americans, the Spanish, the English,

and the French, facilitated the survival of the Islamic institutions of jihad, *hijrah*, and ummah in the Americas.

In spite of the fact that Muslims, Jews, and Africans who converted to Catholicism found more acceptance in Spanish society, Landers reminds us that "they were not totally free of suspicion" – and apparently for good reason.[41] Afroz discloses how Muslims in the Caribbean continued to practice Islam secretly prior to emancipation, even as they made great strides in bringing slavery to a close.[42] Contrary to suggestions in the literature on Islam in the United States, Americans were not always able to keep crypto-Muslims out of the country, as small vessels traveled to and from the mainland and the Caribbean to provide the Americas its very first "underground" railroad.

Even after the United States acquired Florida as a territory in 1819 and banned the continued importation of enslaved Africans into the country after 1820, illegal slave smuggling continued to deliver large numbers of enslaved Africans by way of Florida's long and porous border. Enslaved Africans arrived at a time when Islamic jihads in Africa were on the rise. For example, studies by Rogers and Shillington document the rise of Tukolor jihads of the western Sudan.[43] These jihads were inspired by anti-slavery Fulani jihads led by Uthman dan Fodio (c.a. 1804). Millions of Muslim jihadists were unwittingly captured and transported to the Americas as result of these West African anti-slavery jihads.

Inspired by Uthman dan Fodio's example and, no doubt, the earlier enslavement of African Muslims in the Americas, Al-Hajj Umar from the Futo Toro region, in what is now Senegal, built a large following during the 1840s after a lengthy pilgrimage (hajj) to Makkah in 1826. His jihad sparked a spirited resistance, especially among the non-Muslim Bambara of upper Senegal. Al Hajj Umar spread Islam by force and promoted the capture and sale of non-Muslims in exchange for firearms.[44]

Meanwhile to the south, in the Futa Jalon region of what is today Gambia and Sierre Leone, Samory Toure (1830-90) mounted his own jihad and became a formidable force among the Mandinkas. But instead of enslaving captured opponents, Samory incorporated them into his army and, as such, inspired widespread fame and loyalty by using Islam as a force for unity rather than one of division, as displayed in the case of al Hajj Umar. Described as the "Napoleon of the Sudan," by 1850 Toure had built a formidable well-armed force that included blacksmiths who not only imported firearms, but also manufactured them.[45]

This was the historical context of Muslim enslavement in the Americas. Once in the Americas, those fortunate enough to escape enslavement often joined communities with significant numbers of earlier escapees and otherwise free persons of color. These people became known as Maroons and were found throughout Central and South America as well as what is now the southeastern United States. In fact, this region joins Central and South America as the most well-documented regions of enslaved Muslims in the Americas. For instance, Lotfi estimates that as many as one-third of all slaves in South Carolina, a major distribution point for slaves transported to North America, were Muslim.[46] This phenomenon throughout the literature is viewed as a consequence of planters' preference for Senegambians, who were known for their rice growing skills.

The intersection of these trends caused the flow of many seasoned African warriors into what is now the United States. Once in the region, they appear to have continued the antislavery jihads they mounted in Africa with varying degrees of success. Some joined forces with the Native American Indians in South America to form formidable communities, such as Palmares in Brazil. Others and their descendants joined the Seminole Indians and fought against the American forces led by Andrew Jackson. Of course, enslaved African Muslims were not the only people in the Americas to employ native religion as a tool of resistance against oppression. "Pueblo plains and Northwestern people," according to Martin, "hid their religious societies for generations from condemning non-native authorities and priests."[47] But unlike the survival of religion among Native Americans, the survival of Islam in the United States remains the subject of debate.

Following the destruction of Fort Negro on July 27, 1816, on Prospect Bluff, located on Florida's Apalachicola River, escaped slaves and refugee Indians established free black towns throughout eastern Florida.[48] One of these towns was led by Abraham, a black Indian trader, scout, diplomat, and translator who Muhammad describes as a Muslim.[49] Abraham is widely described in the literature as a spiritual leader and prophet by whites.

The famous slave uprising at Stono, North Carolina, is said to have shown signs of being orchestrated by militarily trained African fugitives. African warriors are described as marching under flags, with arms in hand and in military formation, determined to reach freedom in Fort Musa, a mere 50 miles across the-then American/Florida border.[50] While much has been written about the presence of "black Indians," far less attention has been given to other blacks living among Florida's Seminole Indians. For

example, free black "allies" are described as living among the Seminoles and as, at least according to one author, thinking of themselves not as Indians, but "as Hausa, Mandingos, and Fulani" (i.e., African Muslims).[51]

These events are significant because African Muslim and Indian resistance against American forces in Florida caused the Seminole Indian wars to be widely regarded as the most costly Indian wars in American history. Moreover, the Seminoles were never completely defeated by the American government, which, after a time, simply decided to withdraw its troops.[52] The WOI theory fails to acknowledge this relevant and important history. Yet African jihadists appear to have played a major role in the first and second Seminole Indian Wars, (1816-19 and 1835-38). Rivers describes these wars as "the largest slave uprisings in the annals of North American history."[53] Like their counterparts in Brazil that peaked in the Muslim-led slave rebellion in Bahia in 1835, these encounters appear to have been led by Hausa and, to a lesser degree, Yoruba Muslim jihadists.[54] The fact that jihads in Florida and Brazil occurred in the same year (1835) may quite possibly be explained by the known circulation of a *wathika*, or "pastoral letter," written in Arabic and transmitted to the Americas from Africa, exhorting enslaved African Muslims to remain steadfast to Islam and to embrace jihad.[55]

Conclusion

It would be a mistake to conclude that today's Muslim immigrants have not played a significant role in shaping Islam and Muslims in the Americas. The dramatic increase in the number of Middle Eastern Arabs and others, including Muslims from the Indian subcontinent, emigrating to the United States has had a dramatic impact. Their knowledge of and links to authoritative sources of religious legitimacy, as well as the opportunities they provide for indigenous Muslims to travel and study in the Islamic world, have transformed Muslim life in the Americas for the better. But it is equally mistaken to reduce America's seven-century Islamic experience to twentieth-century Muslim immigrants.

At least six conclusions can be derived from this study:

- More accurate portrayals of Islam and Muslims in the United States are needed, especially those that avoid depicting American Muslims as exclusively Arab, foreigners, and/or terrorists.
- More thorough and complete studies of Islam in the Americas are needed, especially those that reject the assumptions of the WOI

theory, the dominant paradigm governing studies of Islam in the United States for the last 2 decades.

- Scholars must devote greater attention to empirical studies of Islam and Muslims in the Americas that illustrate the diversity of political perspectives among Muslims and that defy simple stereotypical characterizations.
- Observers must offer more inclusive representations of Muslims in the United States in order to include authoritative studies of African Americans in particular, and indigenous Muslims like Latinos/Latinas and white American Muslims, in general.
- Scholars must improve their methodologies when studying Islam in the United States in order to go beyond the studies of twentieth-century Muslim immigrants that are designed to focus narrowly on American Muslims but cannot explain significant developments within the American Muslim community.
- There is a need for greater interdisciplinary studies of Islam in the Americas. Muslim scholars must seek to synthesize and connect their own disparate clusters of information if we are ever to achieve a full and clear picture of Islam and Muslims.

Notes

1. "What Does the Koran Say about Nasreen's Nose Ring?" *The New York Times Magazine*, 7 December 1997, p. 76.
2. See Ali A. Mazrui, "Islam and the Black Diaspora: The Impact of Islamigration," in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).
3. Sultana Afroz "The Jihad of 1831-1832: The Misunderstood Baptist Rebellion in Jamaica," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2001): 240-41.
4. Sylviane Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 69.
5. These studies include Esposito (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995); Carol L. Stone "Estimate of Muslims Living in America," in *The Muslims of America*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Mosque Study, 2001, online at: www.cair-net.org/mosquereport/. M. Arif Ghayur, "Muslims in the United States: Settlers and Visitors," *Annals of the American Academy of Politics*

and Social Sciences, no. 454 (March 1981): 156-58 also estimates that blacks make up 30 percent of all American Muslims.

6. Ali Mazrui, "Islam and the Black Diaspora: The Impact of Islamigration," in *The African Diaspora*.
7. Diouf, *Servants of Allah*.
8. Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (Oxford Press: 2002).
9. Esposito (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 4: 278.
10. Diouf, Servants of Allah.
11. Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002).
12. Sulayman Nyang, *Islam in the United States of America* (Chicago, IL: Kazi Pub., 1999), 13.
13. Ibid., 13,16.
14. Ibid., 16.
15. Philip Jenkins, "America and Islam Go Way Back."
16. Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 6.
17. Michael A. Koszegi and J. Gordon Melton (eds.), *Islam in North America: A Sourcebook* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), p. xi.
18. Gutbi Mahdi Ahmed, "Muslim Organizations in the United States," in *The Muslims of America*, 22.
19. Ibid.
20. A.G. Noorani, *Islam and Jihad: Prejudice versus Reality* (New York, NY: Zed Books, 2002), 124.
21. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 280; Yvvonne Yazbeck and Jame Idleman Smith (eds.) *Muslim Communities in North America* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), xix.
22. Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage*, 12.
23. Ibid., 26.
24. See J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Henrietta Buckmaster, *Let My People Go: The Story of the Underground Railroad and the Growth of the Abolition Movement* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992) [originally published by Harper and Brothers, 1944];, Hugo Prosper Leaming, *Hidden Americans: Maroons of Virginia and the Carolinas* (New York, NY: Garland Pub., 1995); Amir Nashid Ali Muhammad, *Muslims in America: Seven Centuries of History* (1312-1998) (Beltsville, MD: amana publications, 1998); John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

25. Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 240.
26. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: The Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
27. Scott, *Domination*; Muhammad, Muslims in America, and Ajile Aisha Amatullah-Rahman, "A History of Islam among African-Americans," in *Islam in America: Images and Challenges*, ed. Phylis Lan Lin (Indianapolis, IN: University of Indianapolis Press, 1998), 26-40.
28. Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage.*
29. Vibert White, *Inside the Nation of Islam in America* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), 5-6.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 5.
33. Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa* (New York, NY: St. Martin Press, 1995), 226-33.
34. Larry Eugene Rivers, *Slavery in Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 2000), 191.
35. Amatullah-Rahman, "History," 30.
36. Hugo Prosper Leaming, *Hidden Americans: Maroons of Virginia and the Carolinas* (New York, NY: Garland Pub., 1995), 266, 267, 328.
37. For a discussion of Omar bin Said, see David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey* (New York, NY: Alfred Knopf Pub., 1999), 38.
38. Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, 1999), 114.
39. Samory Rashid, "The Islamic Origins of Spanish Florida's Ft. Musa," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2001): 209-26.
40. Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, 29.
41. Ibid., 107.
42. Afroz, "The Jihad of 1831-1832," 240-41.
43. Shillington, *History of Africa*, 231-32, and J. A. Rogers, *World' Great Men of Color* (New York, NY: Collier Macmillian Pub., 1947).
44. Shillington, *History of Africa*, 232.
45. Ibid.
46. Abdelhamid Lotfi, *Muslims on the Black: Five Centuries of Islam in America* (Ifrane, Morocco: Al Akhawayn University Press, 2002), 33.
47. Joel W. Martin, "Indians, Contact, and Colonialism in the Deep South," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 173-74.
48. Landers, *Blacks Society in Spanish Florida*, 231-38. For a discussion of Fort Negro and its aftermath, see J. Leitch Wright, Jr. *Creeks and Seminoles* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 183-84 and 189-205.
49. Muhammad, *Muslims in America*; Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 169-71.

50. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 73, 75, and 76.
51. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 256.
52. For a good discussion of the history of the Seminoles, see Brent Richards Weisman, *Unconquered People: Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee Indians* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1999).
53. Larry Eugene Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 219.
54. See Joao Jose Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, trans. Arthur Brakel (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
55. Afroz, "The Jihad of 1831-1832," 232. Other scholars make reference to a *wathika* that originated in Africa being circulated throughout the Americas, among them Diouf, Quick, and Davidson.