

Islam in the United States

Islam has always held a precarious position in American society. The first recorded evidence of Islam was through the enslaved Africans who were brought over from the Senegambia region in West Africa. Some of them were able to record their experiences and pass on religious practices to their children, but eventually, it was forgotten. The Naturalization Act of 1790 limited citizenship to 'free White persons,' thus essentially blocking the immigration of Muslims.

By the end of the 19th century, immigration conditions were relaxed, resulting in the first wave of Muslim immigration largely composed of people from the former Ottoman Empire. After the 1950s, the Immigration Act of 1952 removed the conditions that restricted Asian immigrants, though it upheld immigration quotas for other regions. Then, in 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act completely removed the national origins quota placed on countries in the Eastern hemisphere. This led to an increase in Muslim immigration from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Most Muslim immigrants were searching for the "American Dream," economic opportunities, and democratic freedom.

As Muslim immigration increased, African Americans also began to learn more about the religion and began to convert to Islam. This resulted in coalitions like the Moorish Science Temple, led by Timothy Drew in the 1920s, and The Nation of Islam, led by Wallace D. Fard, or Fard Muhammad in the 1930s. These movements, especially the Nation of Islam, contributed to negative stereotypes that had begun to frame Islam as violent and militant. As the 20th century advanced, political events in the Middle East like the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 furthered anti-Islamic sentiment.

The terrorist attack on September 11th, 2001, tarnished the image of Islam in the United States and caused a major outbreak of Islamophobia. This was exacerbated by efforts like the "War on Terror" enacted by President Bush as a response to the attack. While the War on Terror focused on militant groups in the Middle East, Arab-Americans were falsely stereotyped as radical Muslims. Further, Islam in its entirety was unfairly tied to the actions of Muslim radicals. This made Muslim-Americans vulnerable to xenophobic and Islamophobic attacks. Additionally, because of the numerous ethnicities that practice the Islam, some are more at risk than others.

Islam is part of the American story. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, there are over three million Muslim-Americans in the United States, and they continue to impact and contribute to our collective American identity.

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Information gathered from: Craig Considine's *Islam in America: Exploring the Issues* (ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2019), Erik Love's *Islamophobia and Racism in America* (New York University Press, 2017); "History of Muslims in the U.S.," ReligionMN(carleton.edu); "New Estimates Show U.S. Muslim Population Continues to Grow," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center); Mariam Elba's "How Islamophobia was Ingrained in America's Legal System Long Before the War on Terror" in *The Intercept*, May 6, 2018; and Y. N. Kly, "The African American Muslim Minority: 1776-1900" in *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 10, no.1, Jan. 1989.