CHAPTER THREE

Islam Comes to America

The First Muslims

Commentators on the emergence of Islam in the North American scene have looked for the most part to the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century as signaling the first real arrival of Muslims in the United States. Indeed, at this time the first Muslim immigrants, primarily from the Middle East, began to come to North America in hopes of earning some kind of fortune, large or small, and then returning to their homelands. We will return to their story shortly. Going back considerably further, some scholars currently argue that for nearly two centuries before the time of Christopher Columbus's venture in 1492, Muslims sailed from Spain and parts of the northwestern coast of Africa to both South and North America and were among the members of Columbus's own crew. African Muslim explorers are said to have penetrated much of the Americas, relating to and sometimes intermarrying with Native Americans. Some hypothesize that Muslims set up trading posts and even introduced some arts and crafts in the Americas. Evidence to support such claims, cited from artifacts, inscriptions, and reports of eyewitness accounts, is still sufficiently vague that the thesis remains somewhat hypothetical.[1]

The date of 1492 is of historical significance not only because of the Columbian exploits. It also signals the official end of the presence of Islam in the Iberian Peninsula, now known as Spain and Portugal. After having enjoyed a glorious rule in the ninth and tenth centuries in Cordoba, and a more checkered overlordship under North African rule in the succeeding

centuries, Muslims saw their fortunes decline rapidly. In 1474 the husband-and-wife team of Fernando of Aragon and Isabella of Seville succeeded to conjoint but separate thrones. Known as the "Catholic monarchs" for their dedication to reuniting all of Spain under Christendom, they captured the last stronghold of Muslim occupation in Granada in 1492. By the turn of the fifteenth century, Muslims (generally referred to as Moors) throughout the peninsula were forced to choose among the unfortunate alternatives of conversion to Christianity, emigration, or death. Many who chose the first continued to practice their faith in secret, maintaining a hidden conclave of Islam for centuries. Others tried openly to rebel and were subsequently expelled from the land that some centuries earlier had been one of the few historical examples of Christian and Muslim (and Jewish) cultural harmony.

Evidence is coming to light indicating that some of those Moors forced to leave managed to make their way to the Caribbean islands, with a few even getting as far as the southern part of the present United States. As scholars representing a variety of disciplines continue to explore these theories, some American Muslims see in them proof that Islam played a role in the early history of this country. The possibility of such connections with Spanish cultures is particularly appealing to those U.S. Hispanics who are attracted by Islamic teachings.

Early Muslim Immigrants in the American Context

With this combination of evidence and conjecture in mind, let us turn to the well-documented history of immigrant Muslims. Migrations occurred in a series of distinguishable periods. The first was between 1875 and 1912 from rural areas of what was then called Greater Syria under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, currently Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon. The vast majority of immigrants from the Middle East at that time were Christian, often somewhat knowledgeable about America because of training in missionary schools. A small percentage was comprised of Sunni, Shi'i, 'Alawi, and Druze Muslims. By the latter half of the twentieth century that ratio was to be reversed. For the most part these early arrivals remain nameless to us, with occasional exceptions such as one Hajj Ali (rendered by Americans as "Hi Jolly"), brought by the U.S. cavalry to the deserts of Arizona and California in 1856 to help breed camels. This experiment failing, Ali is said to have stayed in California to look for gold.

The second wave came at the end of World War I, after the demise of the Ottoman Empire, which had controlled most of the Muslim Middle East. It also coincided with Western colonial rule under the mandate system in the Middle East. Many people coming to America at that time were relatives of Muslims who had already emigrated and established themselves to some degree in this country. U.S. immigration laws passed in 1921 and 1924 imposed quota systems for particular nations, which significantly curtailed the numbers of Muslims who were allowed to enter the country.

During the third period, which lasted through most of the 1930s, immigration was open specifically and only to relatives of people already living in America. The actual numbers of Muslims allowed to settle here were limited and did not rise until after World War II.

The fourth wave, which lasted from 1947 to 1960, saw considerable expansion in the sources of immigration. The Nationality Act of 1953 gave each country an annual quota of immigrants. Because it was based on population percentages in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, however, most of the immigrants allowed to enter the country were from Europe. Still, the trickle of Muslims continued, coming now not only from the Middle East but also from many parts of the world including India and Pakistan (after the partitioning of the subcontinent in 1947), Eastern Europe (mainly from Albania and Yugoslavia), and the Soviet Union. Most of these arrivals settled in large cities such as Chicago and New York. Unlike their earlier counterparts, many of these immigrants were urban in background and well educated, and some were members of the families of former ruling elites. Often already quite Westernized in their attitudes, they came to the United States in hopes of continuing their education or receiving advanced technical training.

The last and final wave was related both to decisions internal to the United States and to events taking place in several parts of the Islamic world. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson signed an immigration act repealing the quotas based on national diversity within the United States. For the first time since the early part of the century one's right to enter the country was not specifically dependent on his or her national or ethnic origin. Immigration from Europe thus declined, while that from the Middle East and Asia increased dramatically, more than half of the newcomers Muslim.

Over the last several decades, political turmoil in many countries of the Muslim world has occasioned increased emigration. In 1967 came what for Muslims was the disastrous and humiliating defeat of Arab troops at the hands of Israel, beginning an exodus of Palestinians headed for the West

that has continued until the present time. The 1979 revolution in Iran and the ascent to power of Ayatollah Khomeini forced many Iranians to flee their country, a number of whom decided to come to America. Civil strife in Pakistan and the breaking away of East Pakistan to form Bangladesh, anti-Muslim pogroms in India, the military coup in Afghanistan, and the Lebanese civil war have all contributed to the Muslim presence in America. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait led to the flight of a large number of Kurds to America, while the civil wars in Somalia and Afghanistan, the tightening of the military regime in Sudan, and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia also swelled the numbers of immigrant Muslims.

Most now come from the subcontinent of South Asia, including Pakistanis, Indians, and Bangladeshis. They first began to arrive as early as 1895 and over the century have been important in the development of Muslim political groups in America. Today this group probably numbers more than one million. Increasingly, they are being joined by sizable groups coming from Indonesia and Malaysia.

Some estimates place the Iranians in this country at close to a million, with representatives of Arab countries of the Middle East, Turks, and Eastern Europeans close behind. Muslims come from a large number of African nations, including Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Uganda, Cameroon, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Tanzania, and many others. Naturally, these immigrants represent a great range of Islamic movements and ideologies. They are Sunnis and Shi'ites, Sufis and members of sectarian groups, religious and secular people, political Islamists and those who espouse no religious or political agenda. Many have come from circumstances in which Islam is the majority religion and find their new minority status in America difficult to adjust to. Others already know what it means to be a member of a minority religious group and come with their coping skills well honed. With each new arrival the picture of Islam in America becomes increasingly complex.

Let us return, then, to the America of the late nineteenth century. The 1860s to the 1880s saw the first significant movement of young, relatively unskilled Muslim men, primarily from Syria and Lebanon in the Middle East. Some were fleeing conscription into the Turkish army, which they saw as little connected to their own national identities. Others had seen Christians from their homeland return from the United States with considerable wealth, and despite their reluctance to go to a setting in which they would be surrounded by non-Muslims, they were tempted to try their luck. World War I brought such devastation to Lebanon that many people were forced to flee to survive. Generally single, or at least traveling without their wives,

they looked upon their time in America as only temporary, hoping that they could earn money to return and establish homes and families. Their dreams were hard to realize, however, as jobs were not easy to find in America, and often they were not able to compete for those that were available because of insufficient knowledge of English or inadequate educational preparation. Many were forced into menial work such as migrant labor, petty merchandizing, or mining. One of the most common occupations was peddling, which required little capital, language skills, or training. Working at first along the Atlantic seacoast, peddlers traveled into the South and West, often facing severe weather, thievery, and local hostility. Other Muslim immigrants served as cheap laborers on work gangs, as, for example, those contributing to the construction of railroads in the Seattle area. Women sometimes found employment in mills and factories, where they worked long hours under extremely difficult conditions. The lack of language skills, poverty, loneliness, and the absence of coreligionists all contributed to a sense of isolation and unhappiness. Compounding these difficulties was the fact that Americans of those decades certainly had little enthusiasm for foreigners, especially those whose customs seemed strange and whose religion was not Christian.

These early groups of Muslim immigrants tried to maintain a community of believers in an alien context, without institutional support. The religious training available to their children and grandchildren was minimal. They recalled that in their home countries, young people grew up with their religion in the air all around them, with holidays, festivals, prayers, and observances a constant part of the environment. America presented a different context, in which maintaining even an awareness, let alone regular observance, of the faith was obviously difficult. Neither schools nor businesses had any facilities for, nor interest in, providing opportunities for daily prayer. Those who wanted to fast during the month of Ramadan could expect no special accommodation in the workplace. Extended families to provide support and instruction were not available, and economic circumstances generally did not allow families to visit home for reinforcement of the larger familial context. Since so much of the practice of Islam is communal as well as personal, it was difficult to observe the prayers, holidays, and other Islamic occasions. The pioneer families thus had to struggle to maintain their religion and identity in a society that had been built on the backs of immigrants but that, paradoxically, had never appreciated the differences in culture that the immigrants brought with them.

Muslim Communities Across the American Continent

As the immigrants' visions of becoming rich quickly began to fade, so did their hopes of an imminent return to homes and relatives overseas. Inevitably, they were forced to adapt to a new life in their adopted land. Young men, eager to marry and establish families, found it difficult if not impossible to locate available young Muslim women in this country. Some went back home for brief visits to take a bride; others had their relatives arrange marriages with girls from their home countries. In any case, traditional patterns of courtship gave way to speed and expediency. Others married outside the faith, sometimes Arab Christian women, although the pressures from other Muslims not to succumb to marriage with "nonbelievers" was great.

Immigrants looked for more permanent kinds of employment, often successfully establishing their own small businesses. Many turned to their native cuisine as a source of revenue, founding coffeehouses, restaurants, bakeries, and small grocery stores. Initially, these were for their compatriots so that Muslims could at least enjoy their own food in a culture in which so much was alien to their tastes and traditions. Gradually, other Americans learned to appreciate Arab cooking, and in most cities today one can enjoy Arab cooking at everything from gourmet restaurants to fast-food joints featuring such treats as *shawarma* (spicy meat cooked on a rotating spit and stuffed into Syrian bread), *hummoẓ* (chickpea dip), and *tabouli* (chopped salad with tomatoes, onions, and parsley).

In the first part of this century many Muslim families found themselves drifting away from the faith, especially the young people, and attempting to hide or do away with those things that marked them as different from their American colleagues. Those whose skin was darker than that of the average American, especially in the South, found that they were treated as "colored" by local populations and were refused access to public facilities reserved for "Whites only." Stereotypes of Arab Muslims as people with large black eyes, big noses and mustaches, and ill-fitting clothes became commonplace. It became very difficult to maintain the use of Arabic as the youth resisted speaking a tongue that sounded strange to their peers. Their refusal to even learn the mother language was doubly painful for their families, as Arabic was not only their cultural but their liturgical language. Gradually, Muslims began to choose American names for their children or to allow the use of nicknames. Muhammad became Mike, Ya'qub was changed to Jack, Nasreen to Nancy. Arab and, to some extent, Muslim identity began to be something

of the past rather than the present and the future as new generations of young people struggled to be part of the culture of their current homeland rather than of their heritage. When these young people matured and began to look to marriage, they turned increasingly to non-Muslim partners, intermarriage rates rising with each generation.

At the same time, however, and to some extent in response to concerns about acculturation and secularization, in a number of places across America Muslims began to organize into communities in which they affirmed their identity.

Midwest America

Among the first of these groupings were those located in the Midwest. North Dakota was home to several of the earliest documented Muslim groups in America, and in the small town of Ross, Muslims organized for prayers in the very early 1900s. They began building a mosque in 1920 but later had to abandon it as many of its members had converted to Christianity.

In Michigan City, Indiana, an Islamic Center of sorts was established as early as 1914, its members primarily Syrians and Lebanese who worked in the mercantile trade. They soon began to attract other Muslims from around the area and in 1924 reorganized under the name The Modern Age Arabian Islamic Society.

Cedar Rapids, Iowa has had a long history of housing a Muslim community. Its members were peddlers turned shopkeepers, providing goods needed for daily life among the farmers of the region. The first continuing mosque in America was begun there in 1920 in a rented hall, and a mosque building was completed in 1934. It has periodically been refurbished and extended, with a minaret added in 1980. Because it is the oldest mosque still in use today, it is often called the "Mother Mosque of America."

New York

Islam has been a presence in the New York City area from the late nineteenth century on, and its history there has been rich and complex. Always a hub of immigrant activity, the city was home to a variety of different racial-ethnic groups, and its Muslim population included merchant seamen, itinerant tradesmen, and those who chose to settle and establish businesses. The American Mohammedan Society was founded in Brooklyn in 1907 by immigrants from Poland, Russia, and Lithuania, who finally purchased a

building to use for a mosque in the early 1930s. By the 1950s the society claimed to have some four hundred members. It has struggled but remains alive today as the Moslem Mosque, a name adopted in the 1960s.

In the 1930s a Moroccan immigrant began New York's second real mosque, called the Islamic Mission of America for the Propagation of Islam and the Defense of the Faith and the Faithful. Located near a significant settlement of Middle Eastern Muslims, the Mission is still an important institution in the city.

Over the past several decades, as the population of greater New York City has mushroomed, so has the construction of mosques and Islamic centers. Some are rebuilt houses, others refurbished office buildings and plants, and still others newly built structures. "Internally driven by the desire to obey and observe Islamic law and externally motivated by what many of them perceive to be a hostile environment, New York City's Muslims have labored to ensure that Islam will evolve into a significant social force within the five boroughs."[2]

Because of the size and heterogeneity of its population, New York City provides perhaps a unique locus for the gathering of Muslims from virtually all parts of the world. While many of the Islamic associations of the city are characterized by particular ethnic identities, others are consciously attempting to use this very diversity to emphasize the potential unity of the Muslim *umma* and are making particular efforts to bring together immigrant and indigenous Muslims as well as Sunnis and Shi'ites. One such group is the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the first mosque to be built in Manhattan, and it is noticeably Islamic in style, with a traditional minaret and dome. The Islamic Center has made significant efforts to attract both immigrant and African American Muslims. National Islamic organizations find the city a particularly fruitful place to extend their activities, and a large number of elementary and upper-level Islamic schools, as well as Muslim stores and businesses, are springing up all over the city.

Chicago

Another of the major cities of America to become home quickly to immigrant Muslims was Chicago. The first Muslims arrived before the turn of the century, primarily from Syria and Palestine. Some claim that Chicago had more Muslims than any other American city in the early 1900s. Like other early arrivals, they had intended not to stay but to earn as much money as possible before returning to their home countries. When they did settle,

they did so generally in the south side of Chicago near the African American district. They too found that their associations with other Muslims were more for cultural identity and support than religious interaction. Yet as they became concerned about the possibility of their children's becoming Christian, they gradually began to take steps to provide some kind of Islamic education for them. After World War I, following the pattern of immigrant waves, more Muslims came to settle in Chicago, especially Arabs holding Turkish passports. The Communist revolution in Russia brought some Muslims from Central Asia to the Chicago area, as did the later partition of the subcontinent of India.

As in other major American cities, Chicago's Muslim population is comprised of people from a great range of cultural, racial-ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Chicago boasts the largest group of Muslims from India, including Hyderabad, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, and it is the home of the African American civic and religious leader Warith Deen Mohammed's organization.

Muslims in Chicago are active in promoting their faith, in providing a range of services to the Islamic community, and in interacting with one another and non-Muslims in fostering good interfaith relations. More than forty Islamic centers have been established to work with the different Muslim groups in greater Chicago, the oldest and largest being the Muslim Community Center established in 1969. Other mosques, centers, and schools are now located in the outlying suburban areas. "It is fair to say that the Muslim community of Chicago is religiously vibrant, financially sound, educated, and active," said a recent commentator. "It plays a significant role in the development and prosperity of the city of Chicago."[3]

California

Moving westward, we find that as early as 1895 Muslims from the Indian subcontinent began to arrive in the coastal area. Mainly farm laborers and unskilled workers from the Punjab, they settled in California, Oregon, Washington, and western Canada. Because the early Punjabi immigrants included both Muslims and Sikhs, Americans tended to lump them into the only category they knew appropriate for India and simply called them Hindus.[4] Soon California became a destination for other Muslim immigrants, with significant numbers from the subcontinent of India arriving after the partition of 1947. California today is a center for Muslims from most areas of the world, especially the Middle East, Iran, and South Asia. Recently,

significant numbers of Afghanis have arrived, along with refugees from Somalia and other areas of Africa.

California as a whole has experienced a notable rise in its Islamic population in the 1990s, and areas such as Los Angeles and San Francisco have become vibrant centers of Muslim life, providing much of the leadership of national Muslim organizations. The Islamic Center of Southern California in Los Angeles, for example, is one of the largest Muslim entities in the United States. It has a well-trained staff led by two Egyptian brothers widely known for their writings and community leadership, and a physical plant with a mosque, media center, school, publications office, and numerous meeting rooms. More than a thousand people normally attend Friday prayers, representing a wide range of racial-ethnic backgrounds. The center provides a range of services, including counseling on anything from divorce to drugs, to teens, young adults, and families.

Dearborn, Michigan

Originally home to small numbers of Sunni Ottoman Turks in the early years of the twentieth century, Dearborn, Michigan has continued to attract both Muslim and Christian Arab immigrants. Today it has one of the largest concentrations of Islamic communities in the nation, with sizable groups of Lebanese, Yemeni, and Palestinian Muslims.

In 1919 a Sunni mosque was built in nearby Highland Park, but it enjoyed only a short life. However, when the Ford Motor Company moved its plant to Dearborn in the late 1920s, providing sustainable and sometimes even lucrative sources of revenue for immigrant workers as well as for blacks from the South, a significant Arab community began to form. The pay was only five dollars a day, and working conditions were bad, but English was not required, and many Muslim immigrants welcomed the steady employment. Palestinian Muslims augmented the early Lebanese immigrant group in the late 1940s. A few Yemenis came down from the St. Lawrence Seaway to the Detroit area as early as 1910, but for the most part Yemenis have arrived since the middle of the century, mainly from Sana. Most recent arrivals have been Arabs fleeing the wars in south Lebanon and Beirut, as well as from other towns and villages in Lebanon and Palestine. In 1938 the Sunnis built a mosque, followed by the construction of the Shi'i Hashemite Hall in 1940.

Today the Arab Muslim community, Sunnis and Shi'a together, are a close-knit group with numbers of coffeehouses, stores, and businesses that

continue to attract immigrants. One can walk for blocks in some areas and find only Arabic signs in grocery and other stores. Five active mosques or Islamic centers in the Dearborn area, two Sunni and three Shi'i, summon worshipers to prayer five times each day.

Quincy, Massachusetts

The Islamic community in Quincy, Massachusetts provides another interesting look at the establishment and development of a continuing Islamic presence in America. Its location too was determined by the availability of jobs, in this case in the well-established ship-building industry of New England.

The group began to assemble sometime after 1875 with the settlement of the first generation of Muslims primarily from Lebanon. The current Islamic Center of New England was the dream of some seven families (both Sunni and Shi'i) who had settled in the area by the early 1900s. In 1934 Muslim groups from the greater Boston area affiliated with the Muslims of Quincy to form the Arab American Banner Society. Reorganized in 1952, it effectively functioned as a Muslim organization, with affiliated charities allowing the members to perform the obligatory almsgiving. Both men and women in the Quincy community found themselves participating in community activities and even taking leadership roles. They were businessmen, teachers, and professionals as well as merchants and blue-collar workers. Not surprisingly, with this degree of establishment they began to think about building a mosque, which they supported by a wide range of fund-raising activities. The building was completed in 1963, at which time it became officially known as the Islamic Center of New England.[5] Recently, under the direction of Imam Talal Eid (see "Profiles") the community has moved from Quincy to larger accommodations in Sharon, Massachusetts.

Shi'ite Islam in America

From the middle to late nineteenth century on, Muslim immigrants to the United States and Canada have included both Sunnis and Shi'ites, as well as members of other smaller sectarian groups. Of the more than one billion Muslims in the world today, approximately one tenth are Shi'ite. They constitute almost all of the population of Iran and more than half that of Iraq and are present in various communities in Africa, India, and Pakistan.

Precise information as to the earliest movements of Shi'ites to this coun-

try is difficult to come by. We do know that soon after the arrival of Lebanese Shi'ites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, others from India came to settle here. Later they were joined by Shi'ites from Iraq and Iran. By the 1950s small groupings of Shi'i families were beginning to be found in some of the major cities of America. While in recent years the community has been represented by well-educated professionals and members of the middle and upper middle classes, such was not true of the earlier immigrants. Shi'ites have always been among the less advantaged, both economically and educationally, and early Lebanese Shi'ite immigrants to America reflected this disadvantage.

It is estimated that today approximately one fifth of American Muslims belong to Shi'a sects. Many are from Iran, coming originally as students during the reign of the Shah and returning after the revolution of 1979. The second largest group of Shi'ites comes from Iraq, with smatterings of others from different global areas such as Lebanon, India, and Pakistan. In the larger urban centers they tend to have separate centers and places of worship, although in smaller cities and towns they often participate in already established Sunni mosques.

For the most part, when it is possible, Twelvers from Iran and those from the Indian subcontinent choose to keep their communities separate in America because of both language and cultural differences.[6] The latter are eager not to be associated with the Iranians, partly to avoid sharing in the American prejudices concerning Iranian Shi'ite "fundamentalists." The notoriety of events in places like Iran and Lebanon, in fact, has had a double influence on Shi'ites in America. On the one hand, it has heightened feelings of distrust on the part of other Americans. On the other, it has served to encourage greater efforts on the part of Shi'is to promote understanding of their faith as a distinguishable entity within the complex of American Islam. Shi'ites in America, like other immigrant Muslims, are in the process of determining how to adapt their own Islamic practice, often heavily associated with particular cultural expressions, to the new environment. In this process they need to consider where their highest priorities lie—with Islam as a whole, with Shi'ism in general, or with their own particular sectarian affiliation.

Ithna 'Ashari (Twelver) Shi'ites

In the absence of a living Imam within the Shi'ite community, leadership for Iranian Twelvers has come from men designated as *mujtahids*, educated

deputies of the hidden Imam. They are organized into a central authority, independent of government control, that is supported by the payment of a religious tax called *al-khums*, a 20 percent levy required of all Twelvers and often paid in addition to their *zakat*. This system has extended to the United States, where *khums* money has provided for the building of Islamic centers and for the salaries of religious teachers and leaders. Shi'i scholars report considerable competition for *khums* money among the different Shi'i groups in America. The Kho'i Foundation in New York, despite the death of the Iranian Imam Kho'i, still continues to collect monies from a number of Shi'ites in the United States. Thus American Ithna 'Asharis, while still looking to Iran for leadership and guidance, are able to maintain an essentially autonomous position as they struggle to preserve and redefine their identity in this country.[7]

Returning to Dearborn, Michigan, we find an interesting example of Shi'ism in America. In the middle of the century the community was in serious danger of being absorbed into the more dominant Sunnism of the area. The Shi'ites lacked trained leadership, and many Muslims were unwilling to acknowledge significant differences between the two branches of Islam. With the arrival in succeeding years of *shaykhs* who were prepared to teach the Shi'i community about its own history and practices, distinctions became clearer. More lenient practices in relation to the mosque, such as holding parties and dances, gave way to the stricter and more classical customs of using the mosque only for worship and religious instruction.

The civil war in Lebanon brought a large number of Shi'ite refugees to Dearborn. That event and the Iranian Revolution have had a significant effect on the lives of these Shi'ites, who have had to defend themselves against the prejudice of the American public. This, too, has added to their sense of solidarity and identity apart from the Sunnis of the area.

The Shi'i mosques in Dearborn, which loosely reflect ethnic particularities, differ primarily in the degree to which they adhere to Islamic law. Those that are stricter require women to be properly covered, follow Islamic dietary laws with care, and are in general reluctant to make any compromises with American society. Others argue, through their leaders, that to be too strict is to run the risk of alienating members, especially the youth, and that new times and new places do indeed encourage new understandings and interpretations. Linda Walbridge tells the story of a woman asking one of the Muslim leaders if wearing makeup is permissible for women. "Knowing full well that it was hopeless to ask this woman to throw away her mascara and eyeliner completely," she says, "he instead opted to encourage her to pray and to follow

the rules that forbid wearing makeup while at prayer. In this way he did not alienate her, yet gave her sound religious advice."[8]

Like many American Muslims, Shi'ites in Dearborn have had to make accommodations to their new environment. While Friday mosque services continue to be held, they are attended only by men. On Sundays, however, far more people come to the Islamic Center of America, including women and children, where they hear sermons that traditionally would have been delivered only on Fridays.

Isma'ili (Sevener) Shi'ites

The two main groups of Seveners are known generally as the Nizaris and the Mustalis, or Boharas. In the United States the Boharas are the smaller of these groups, with centers in major urban areas such as Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Detroit. Boharas in America, while concerned for the unity of Islam, place a high priority on community preservation and generally associate both religiously and socially only with members of their own group. Intermarriage among these groups and others within the Muslim community is rare.

Nizari Isma'ili Shi'ites are a larger and faster growing segment of American Islam. While firm about maintaining their distinct identity, they are much more assimilated than the Boharas. Nizaris are united in allegiance to their religious leader, Imam Prince Karim Aga Khan, who is considered a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and 'Ali. The Imam gives both spiritual guidance and advice as to the general welfare of his community.

When the first Nizaris came to America, they were small in number and had to gather informally for prayer, with their religious life taking place primarily at home. Since the increased immigration of Nizaris after 1972, worship life has become much more organized, with prayer halls and centers springing up in many cities. They are the loci of particular commemorative days, such as the birthday of the Prophet and the Imamate Day honoring the time when the present Imam assumed his position.

Members of the community select the religious leader of the local mosque, and the Imam confirms the selection. The leader is generally not paid for his services, and he does not serve as a spiritual guide to the other members. He performs certain ceremonial functions at the prayer hall and on public occasions.

As always, it is difficult to determine exact percentages, but estimates

are that Nizari Isma'ilis comprise some 10 percent of the American Shi'ite community. Since the middle of the century the Aga Khan has made strong efforts to reconcile and integrate his followers into the Muslim community as a whole. The current Aga Khan is a well-known public figure who in America often addresses academic audiences, as in his 1996 commencement address at Brown University.

The Druze Community in America

Another faction of Fatimid Shi'is splintered in the eleventh century, forming what we now know as the Druze community. By tradition the Druze, living primarily in the mountainous regions of Lebanon and in some parts of Syria, have kept their beliefs hidden from outsiders. Druze faith and practice have been passed on only to progeny, with marriages outside of their tradition strongly discouraged. Whether the Druze are considered Muslim, or even consider themselves Muslim, has been the subject of much controversy. In any case, their presence, though small, has been a significant part of the Lebanese migration over the last century to both North and South America, as well as to parts of Australia and West Africa. In the first several decades of this century, many immigrants to America identified as Muslim were Druze settling in regions such as Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee in the South and up to Washington in the West.

Like others from the Middle East, for some time Druze in America chose to deemphasize their identity and to try to become more American. Many officially converted to Christianity, becoming members of Presbyterian or other Protestant denominations. In more recent times, however, there have been notable movements within the U.S. Druze community not only to claim their identity as Druze but also to include in that identity their affiliation to Islam. Emphasizing the importance of what is sometimes called "Tawhid Faith," they acknowledge not only their Islamic roots but also their continuing allegiance to mainstream Islam.

After a century in America the community, while still small, is growing and struggling with how to be true to their Druze culture and heritage, their role as Arab Americans, and the tradition of Islam. As Abdallah E. Najjar, spokesperson for the Druze community in America, said at a national Druze convention, "We do not deny our history and native culture as we blend the old and the new into an integrated reality possessing hybrid vigor."[9] Many immigrant Muslim communities in America might claim such a goal.

Converts to Islam

Anglo Converts

While the great majority of Muslims in America are either African American or part of the immigrant population, a growing but significant number of other Americans are choosing to adopt Islam as their religion and way of life. Estimates of the number of Anglo Muslims in the United States range from twenty to fifty thousand, but as always it is difficult to determine anything close to exact figures. Some of these are Anglo women who have married Muslim men. Islamic law, as we have seen, permits Muslim males to marry women from among the People of the Book, namely Christians or Jews. While there is no compulsion for such women to convert, because the children will be raised according to the religion of the father, a number of them do choose to adopt Islam. Their conversions may occur because a women's husband is eager for her to accept Islam, or she is persuaded that Islam is the right religion for her, or she wants her children raised in a monolithic home. Probably more than half of the marriages between immigrant Muslim males and non-Muslim American females end in the wife's conversion to Islam, although it should be noted that surveys of female converts indicate that in many cases their adoption of Islam came before marriage to a Muslim man. Children are also raised in the religion of the father if a Muslim woman should marry a Christian or Jewish man. Although such marriages are not legally condoned, they do happen occasionally, putting great pressure on the husband to convert.

Other Anglo Americans choose to convert to Islam for a variety of reasons. Some find the intellectual appeal of a great civilization of scholarly, scientific, and cultural achievements a refreshing antidote to the often anti-intellectual and secularist climate of the contemporary West. One of the reasons for the spread of Islam in various parts of the world over the centuries has been the straightforward simplicity of the declaration of faith and the five pillars that an observant Muslim is obliged to follow. For some Americans this directness is an appealing alternative to what they may find to be confusing Christological doctrines and Trinitarian affirmations espoused by the Christian Church. As Islam in one form or another has attracted many blacks as an antidote to the continuing white racism of American society, other Americans have found its egalitarian platform a viable alternative to a Christianity that sometimes seems inextricably bound to prejudicial practices. Some Anglos without intimate personal relationships or close family connections hope that in a religion so explicitly community oriented they

may find solace from loneliness. Unfortunately, that is not always the result, as Muslims orient their communities not only to the commonality of Islam but also and often to the particularity of national and ethnic identities.

The zeal of the new convert to any faith or ideology is notoriously high and certainly not less so in the case of Americans who decide to adopt Islam. Generally religiously conservative in belief and in dress, for reasons of personal conviction, with perhaps the desire to persuade themselves and their families of the rightness of their decision, converts are articulate and enthusiastic spokespeople for a clear and sometimes rather inflexible interpretation of their new faith. Some of the current literature discusses the loneliness Anglo converts may feel after their conversion, especially those not married to Muslims. They share neither in the specific cultures represented by immigrants nor in the ethnic identity of African Americans. Some resent what they feel to be the unnecessary monitoring of their progress as Muslims by conservative immigrants. "Sometimes the questions can become pretty intimidating," writes one convert. "For example, if you are approached by a salafi [conservative] group, Beware! They will test your knowledge of Islam. . . . Don't get nervous. Don't panic. Remain calm. . . ."[10] Some Anglo converts have formed support groups to help one another in the transition to a new faith and identity.

Hispanic and Native American Converts

A good deal of attention is currently being given to the importance of making more converts from the Latin American community in America. Enthusiasts are quick to point to the natural affiliation of Islam with many parts of Hispanic culture, begun with its movement into the Iberian Peninsula in 711. Throughout the years of Muslim presence in Spain until its expulsion after 1492, Islam and Spanish culture were deeply intertwined. Whether such historic affiliation really influences the decision of some Hispanic Americans to adopt Islam may be questionable, especially given the fact that many who convert prefer to ignore their Hispanic heritage and refrain from speaking Spanish in the attempt to be part of the American Muslim "scene."

Islam first appeared in the barrios of the American Northeast in the early 1970s. Mainly first-generation Puerto Ricans from New York, many of these converts entered Islam by affiliating with African American mosques. Since then, immigrant Muslims have tried to organize missionary movements among the Latino populations, with the end of integrating them

into established Sunni mosque communities. Hispanics have found much in Islamic culture that is akin to their own cultural heritage, especially the importance of the family structure and specifically defined roles for men and women. Divorce, which has been growing in American Hispanic communities, is noticeably much lower among Latino Muslim couples.

Muslims are slowly waking to the reality that the Hispanic community in America is a ripe source for new converts. "Olé to Allah!" reads the cover page of an issue of *The Message* devoted to articles about American Latino Muslims.[11] Increasing attention is being paid in Muslim journals to the fact that American Hispanics have been virtually ignored as a community in need of *da'wa*, and many are arguing for increased efforts at providing basic Islamic instruction in Spanish. A particular need has been identified for accurate Spanish translations of the Qur'an. The few Hispanic Muslims who actively teach members of their communities about Islam lament that so little is available on the history, traditions, doctrines, and practices of the faith for those whose first language is Spanish. Some works suffer from having been written first in an Asian language, then translated into English, and finally rendered in Spanish.

One illustration of the growth of Latino Islam is a missionary effort in New York City entitled PIEDAD (Propagación Islámica para la Educación y Devoción de Ala'el Divino). A Puerto Rican convert began PIEDAD in 1987, and it has focused particularly on Latinas who are married to Muslims as well as Latinos who are incarcerated. Another Islamic Latino organization in the El Barrio area of New York City, called the Alianza Islámica, began some fifteen years ago as an outgrowth of the Darul Islam movement, illustrating the close association between Hispanic converts and African American Islam. Operating out of a small storefront, it provides a number of social services for the surrounding community as part of its outreach program. Members do after-school tutoring, plan summer recreation, offer drug and alcohol as well as marriage counseling, and provide diploma instruction for kids who have dropped out of school. The Alianza has served to bring wayward Muslims back into the fold, as well as to attract new members from the Hispanic community.

In California the recently formed Asociación Latina de Musulmanes en las Américas (ALMA) seeks to spread Islam among Spanish-speaking people, educating them about the contribution of Islam to their society and culture, with the hope of bringing them back to their ancestors' way of life. ALMA is currently planning to begin publication of the first Spanish Islamic magazine for distribution in the United States, Canada, and Latin America.

While their numbers are still very small, a few Native Americans are also becoming more vocal about their identification with Islam and are reminding other Muslims of the long association of Indians and Muslims on the North American continent. Seminoles in Florida claim that some of their number are descended from African slaves who before emancipation managed to escape and mingle in their ranks, even converting some of the Seminoles to Islam. The Algonquian and Pima languages are said to contain words with Arabic roots. Cherokees claim that a number of Muslims joined their ranks and say that the chief of the Cherokees in 1866 was a Muslim named Ramadhan Ibn Wati.

Some Muslims are now recognizing significant commonalities between Native American and Qur'anic world views, such as a deep reverence for nature and obedience to God's laws for the created world and the acknowledgment that people of all races and colors must be treated equally. Native American understanding of a kind of original divine instruction for humankind parallels the Qur'anic concept of the *din al-fitra*, or natural inherent religious response basic to all people. Native American awareness of divine presence in all the four directions is compared with the Qur'anic assurance that wherever one should turn, there is the face of God. Native American traditions pay much attention to the importance of sacred sites and pilgrimage, which balances the Islamic duty of *hajj* to Mecca and pilgrimages to the tombs of saints. The current concern of American Muslims for what they see as the excesses of modernism and secularism in the West resonates in much of Native American tradition. As Muslims and Native Americans both struggle to clarify and maintain their identities in the American context, it may well be that their ties, both historical and philosophical, will be strengthened.

American Converts to Sufism

Another reason for a number of Americans to consider themselves Muslim is their association with Sufi groups in this country. As indicated in the previous chapter, Sufism is a complex part of the history of Islam, sometimes greatly appreciated and at other times rejected as a deviation from the true faith. To the extent to which Sufi groups in America associate themselves with one of the established and recognized Sufi orders, they must be counted as part of what has emerged as a genuine American Islam. Again, the lines are often blurred, and who is or is not a "real" Sufi may be anyone's call. Some U.S. groups that choose to adopt the name Sufi as part of the

New Age movement do little more than combine body movements with stylistic meditative practices and have no Islamic theological understanding of Sufism.

Particularly attractive to some Americans are forms of Sufi dancing. Normally, these dances are done with a leader in the center, along with a musician, the participants grouped in a circle or circles moving in rhythm. Sometimes the movements are accompanied by group chanting. Such chanting and dancing have often been suspect to orthodox Islam but in some cases, such as the "whirling dervishes," have become a recognized and honored part of the tradition.

Muslims associated with long-established and internationally recognized orders have little patience for the "silliness" of Americans eager to adopt new fads of so-called spirituality, and they are quick to point out that pseudo-Islamic Sufi groups have no legitimate role in American Islam. Reflecting the tensions of Sufism with mainline Islam over the centuries, many immigrant Muslims of a traditional orientation find it difficult to acknowledge the legitimacy of any American Sufi groups. Muslim organizations that are supported financially by Saudi Arabia refuse to allow the participation of Sufi groups. While those who actually "convert" to Islam via Sufism are relatively few, there seems to be a growing interest in Sufism as both a spiritual/psychological discipline and, in the American orders, a locus of fellowship and communal identification. In general, Americans find Sufi movements open, accessible, tolerant, and supportive of individual needs and concerns.

Interestingly, two of the most popular Sufi personages in the West in this century, Hazrat Inayat Khan and Idries Shah, have both seen Sufism as a phenomenon distinguishable from the formal religious structure of Islam. The writings of these two teachers, with their emphasis on the inner life over the outer forms of religion, have been voluminous and influential, especially on young American "seekers."

Hazrat Inayat Khan, who was initiated into the Nizami branch of the Chistiyya Order in India, studied with both Muslim and Hindu masters. His philosophy blended Advaita Vedanta and the "unity of being" philosophy of the school of the Andalusian mystic Ibn ʿArabi. Commissioned by his teacher to bring harmony to East and West, he devoted his life to introducing Sufism to America. He was one of the first to teach Sufi doctrines in the West, lecturing and traveling across America from 1910 to 1927, initiating a number of disciples, and founding the Sufi Order in the West. Many of his teachings are contained in a multivolume series titled *The Sufi Message of Ḥaẓrat Inayat Khan*.[12]

When Inayat died in 1927, his son Vilayat Khan, still a boy, inherited leadership of the order. Severe tensions arose in the group, and some turned to the well-known Sufi leader Meher Baba for direction. One of those whose personal claims would not sit well with orthodox Muslims, Baba, who was born in India in 1894, believed himself to have realized Godhood. After 1925 he never spoke, communicating with his disciples by hand gestures or in writing. A number of his many books were "dictated" in this manner.

In the 1960s, a time of growing appeal of Sufism in America, the European-educated Pir Vilayat Khan emerged as effective leader of the Sufi Order in the West, and the movement grew rapidly. The classically trained Pir is said to have felt somewhat distanced by some of his new hippie followers. He was particularly distressed when his disciples wanted to use drugs to induce a spiritual state.

The Sufi Order in the West is still under Vilayat's guidance, although it has expanded to include a variety of teaching and experiential modes. The order continues to stress spiritual awakening, but it also does work in social services, education, and health. It is active in a number of major cities and sponsors retreats, psychotherapy and healing seminars, work camps, and musical presentations. Most Muslim groups in America look on the activities of the Sufi Order in the West, however, with suspicion and even disapproval, disclaiming it as a truly Islamic movement.

Idries Shah, a popular writer and teacher who emphasizes the psychological aspects of Sufism, has been influential in America since the 1960s. An Indian of Afghani lineage, Shah spent most of his time in the West in England, although his writings have been on the shelves of American bookstores from the beginning. Particularly popular are his folktales imparting Sufi wisdom through anecdote and example. Shah, whose followers constitute the Society for Sufi Studies, has been especially critical of those who perpetuate old forms and practices of Sufism that are not relevant to the modern Western world. Shah's works, such as the early and still popular *The Sufis*, conspicuously lack terminology that would specifically identify his interpretation of Sufism with traditional Islam. His writings especially appeal to Westerners of a more intellectual orientation.

Since the 1970s, Sufi groups that have clearly been formed and adapted to fit American culture and demand have been joined by others whose members are immigrants well familiar with Sufi lineage and the practices of a specific *tariqa*, or path, of which they were members in their home countries. These people tend to be more traditional than the earlier practitioners of Sufism in America and more committed to stressing the continuity of Sufism

with Islam. Americans are increasingly drawn to these teachers, attracted by the mystical and pietistic form of Islam represented by their orders.

One group that illustrates a blend of New Age influences with the more institutional tradition-based Islamic orders is the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, located in Philadelphia. Its members are both immigrants and American converts from a range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The experience of Bawa's followers serves as a good illustration of the blending of East and West, immigrant and indigenous experience, and traditional Sufism with new adaptations. The Sri Lankan-born Bawa, a member of the Qadiriyya order, first arrived in America at the invitation of a young Philadelphia woman who had corresponded with him for several years. He quickly drew a number of devotees and decided to remain to fulfill his mission in America. Many of those who found his message appealing were young Americans whose lives had been troubled and lacked a spiritual base. Only gradually were they made to realize that his teachings were grounded in Islam and that he was part of a long and venerated Sufi lineage. He is said to have so embodied the principles of love and charity in his own person and life that simply being in his presence was spiritually uplifting. He considered himself, and was considered by his followers, to be their *shaykh*, or spiritual leader.

Bawa was eager to keep abreast of the latest technological developments, and his use of television and video equipment in the propagation of his message added to the sense that, despite his lineage, the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship was a genuine American order constantly adapting to new developments. Bawa's death in 1986 did not mean the dissolution of the Fellowship, and in fact the group has member branches in several other cities, such as Boston. It did, however, raise the question of what it means to be an American Sufi group. By what means can another *shaykh* emerge to guide the community, and will such a person come from overseas or be an American-born convert to Islam? Because of the training prerequisites of a Sufi leader in a traditional order such as the Qadiriyya, the question of what constitutes American Islam may be sharper for Sufis than for other Muslims. The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship is only one such Sufi group to face these questions.[13]

Some Sufi groups combine holistic health, music, dance, poetry, and other aesthetic forms with traditional Sufi meditation. Many have become active in the *da'wa*, or missionary activity, of Islam in America. Members of the new generation of Muslims born in America to immigrant parents are joining white converts to Sufi movements. For many men and women,

Sufism seems to breathe the possibility of life and activity into religion in a way that they have not known before, at the same time that one's relationship both to the *shaykh* and to God gives new meaning to the very word *islam*, submission. Sufism also seems to provide a way of cutting across the racial, ethnic, and cultural definitions of so many American Muslim groups, which despite the egalitarian appeal of Islam often continue to segregate themselves along lines of particular identity. In recent years Americans who have studied with Sufi masters abroad have returned and written numerous works to distill the Sufi message into a distinctly Western idiom.

Sufism particularly interests some American women, who find in it an appealing alternative to the Christianity or Judaism, or the agnostic environment, in which they may have been raised. Particularly attractive are those orders more lenient in their restrictions on, for example, the mixing of women and men during the worship time. Sometimes practitioners may be seated in a circle, with men forming one half and women the other. Those Sufi groups unconcerned about separation of the sexes generally pay little attention to any affiliation with the tradition of Islam. As in the Muslim community as a whole, there is both considerable discussion about the appropriateness of women's assuming leadership roles in Sufi organizations and increasing examples of such leadership. The Naqshbandiyya, a "sober" order founded in the Indian subcontinent in the fourteenth century by Baha' al-Din al-Naqshbandi, is particularly popular in the United States and Canada and has provided a context in which significant numbers of women have felt comfortable participating.

Several Shi'i Sufi orders exist in America, one of the most evident being the Nimatullahi Order of Sufis founded and led by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, former head of the department of psychiatry at Tehran University in Iran. The order was established in America with his arrival in the 1970s. Located first in California, it maintains centers in a number of American cities, including San Francisco, New York, Washington, D.C., and Boston. Nurbakhsh, who himself now lives in England, stresses a Sufism concerned with doing and seeing rather than thinking and talking, one whose aim is the realization of Truth through love and devotion. The writings of this prolific leader include works on Sufi poetry, psychology, and spiritualism, Jesus in the eyes of Sufis, and Sufi women. He is perhaps best known for *In the Paradise of the Sufis*.[14] Other Iranian Shi'i Sufi orders have grown up across the country in the past several decades. Generally, they emphasize the connection of Sufis with the mystical movements of Islam above the beliefs and practices that would set these groups off as distinctively Shi'i.

Among the numerous groups loosely associated with Sufism, or at least inspired by Islam, is the Indonesian spiritual movement of Subud. Begun around the middle of the century and now with branches in a number of countries, Subud became part of the American scene in the 1970s at the time that so many new movements were taking root. Reported to have once had more than seventy North American centers, Subud continues to attract small numbers of American adherents who, while certainly not seeing themselves as converts to Islam, are drawn by the appeal of participating in social welfare projects on an international scale.

One interesting American communal-living experiment cast in a decidedly Sufi mold has been the establishment of the Dar al-Islam community located in Abiquiu, New Mexico. Distinct from the African American Darul Islam movement described above, this first Islamic village in America was begun in 1980, with the support of Saudi Muslims, as an attempt to model the piety of the early Islamic community of Prophet Muhammad. Located on more than eight thousand acres of land northwest of Albuquerque, the community is home to an adobe brick mosque and school designed by the late and famed Egyptian architect Hassan Fathi. With the goal of bringing together Muslims of all backgrounds from across America as well as from Europe and the Middle East, the community stresses the interracial and interethnic nature of Islam assured by God in the Qur'an: "We have made you tribes and nations so that you might know one another" (Sura 49:13). Members, who dress in a variety of styles appropriate to Southwest existence and to a modest understanding of Islamic requirements, try as much as possible to live a life of quiet piety exemplifying the virtues of Islamic life. At present, it must be acknowledged that the Abiquiu experiment is far from reaching its goal of becoming a large and Islamically organized living community. Never more than twenty-five families in all, membership in residence has dwindled, and much of the original land has been sold. The Dar al-Islam, nonetheless, performs an important service for American Islam through its Institute of Traditional Islamic Studies.

The Ahmadiyya Community of North America

While the classification of Islamic individuals and associations in America into immigrant, African American, and convert is generally useful, some groups do not fall neatly into these categories. Immigrants who are converting to classical Sufism in the United States are one such exception. Another is the Ahmadiyya community, originally a Pakistani missionary movement,

which has been a presence in North America for many decades. Its members have worked since the early part of the twentieth century for the conversion of Americans to Islam. Many, but certainly not all, of those converts have been African American. This group is one of the most active within the Islamic fold (if, indeed, it is within, an identity challenged by many Muslims) in the work of *da'wa*, calling or recruiting new members to its understanding of the faith of Islam. Ahmadis have worked particularly on translating and providing copies of the Qur'an to Muslim communities around the world. Claiming more than ten million followers in more than one hundred countries, they have recruited many thousands in North America.

The founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was born in 1835 in Qadian in India's Punjab. An enormously prolific writer, he claims to have received divine revelations or signs legitimating his role as an Islamic leader. Then in 1889 he announced that he was the *mahdi* whose coming Muslims have long expected. Critics have charged that he actually appropriated the status of prophet, an accusation that his followers have explicitly denied. Around the turn of the century the movement began to move beyond India. Of its two branches, only the group called the Qadiani Jamaat has been influential on the American scene. Sunni Muslims have denounced the Ahmadiyya movement as a deviation from the true teachings of Islam, both because of its founder's claims about his own status and because Ahmadis believe that Jesus was not taken up to heaven at the crucifixion but continued his work on earth, ending up in Kashmir, in India. When statistics about the number of Muslims in America are cited, other Muslims are adamant that Ahmadis not be included. Ahmadis, however, claim vigorously that the movement does not depart from Islam at all and see the Ahmadiyya movement as an active and effective organ for the recruitment of new Muslims in America and across the world.

The first Ahmadi missionary to the United States was Mufti Muhammad Sadiq in 1920. He began a society for the preservation of American Islam and in 1921 started publication of the periodical *Moslem Sunrise* (changed in 1959 to *Muslim Sunrise*). Chicago became the official headquarters of the American Ahmadiyya movement and the site of its first mosque. Ahmadi missionaries played a significant role in the early decades of the century in attacking what they saw as the blatant racism of American society. By 1940 there were said to be between five and ten thousand converts in the United States. In 1950 the Ahmadiyya headquarters moved to the American Fazl Mosque in northwest Washington, D.C. This continues to serve as the center for the educational and propaganda mission of the movement.

Copies of its publications are distributed to members of Congress and other government officials, foreign diplomats, the press, and so on. At present Ahmadi centers can be found in more than fifty cities in the United States and Canada.

In their Western missionary work, Ahmadis have been particularly attuned to the necessity of maintaining a strict Islamic faith in the face of Western secularism and materialism. Ahmadi women, who generally dress more conservatively than women in other Muslim or pseudo-Muslim movements, have played and continue to play important roles in the American Ahmadi mission. Like many other Muslims, Ahmadis worry about appropriate education for their children, especially girls, and often opt to develop their own schools. Members of the community bear the special burden of affirming their Islamic identity both within a culture that does not appreciate it and as part of Sunni Islam, which does not accept it.

Clearly, the picture of American Islam is growing increasingly complex. Stories of immigrant and African American Islam in this country for a long time were quite distinct and separate, and relations between blacks and immigrants were generally quite rare. Now, however, those stories are coming to be interrelated. Added to this fascinating mix are the conversions of whites, Hispanics, and Native Americans to Islam. These groups are still small but are significant both for their actual presence and for the impetus they give to the *da'wa*, or mission movement, within Islam. They are also of great importance to those who want to gain political capital out of the fact that American Islam is multiracial, multi-ethnic, and growing. Let us turn now to the story of African Americans and the many ways in which they have played and continue to play a crucial role in the development of American Islam.

CHAPTER FOUR

Islam in the African American Community

Students of black religion in America are now increasingly aware that voluntary immigration was only one of the ways in which Muslims arrived on the shores of "the promised land." Others came against their will, finding America a land not of promise but of bondage. These were the Muslims brought in the slave trade of colonial and post-colonial America. It is now a well-established fact that a significant number of black Africans brought to North America during the antebellum slave trade were Muslim. Numbers are impossible to determine, but there may have been several thousand. Some have even postulated that as many as 20 percent of African slaves were Muslim, but that estimate is probably high. These men and women seized into slavery came from a variety of areas in sub-Saharan Africa from Senegal to Nigeria. Some were highly literate and educated in their religion, while others were more humble practitioners. A few, such as the well-documented Prince Ayub Ibn Sulayman Diallo, who was abducted in 1731, even came from the ruling elements of their societies.

Most of these African Muslims had never had any contact with whites before being taken into slavery. The account of one of them, Kunta Kinte of Senegambia, is documented in Alex Haley's popular novel *Roots*,[1] also broadcast in a series specially made for television. The novel sets the scene of Kinte's Islamic heritage from page 1, on which Haley describes the Muslim early morning call to prayer, which, as he says, had been offered up as long as any living person there could remember. Haley records other occasions attesting to Kinte's faith, as when he prays to Allah while chained in the bottom of a "Christian" slave ship.