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Convergence and Divergence in an Emergent Community: A Study of Challenges Facing U.S. Muslims

Sulayman S. Nyang

The history of Islam in the United States is not only a story of immigrants searching for economic opportunities in a strange land. It is also the experience of conversion by a small but growing body of indigenous men and women in American society who discover a new way of life and a new belief system that fills a void in their spiritual lives. Islam has also received support from students visiting the United States since the 1930s. But if the main difference among the immigrants has been their sectarian interpretations of the Qur'an and of the life and example of the Prophet Muhammad, the perennial and significant question of race has continued to serve as a wedge between the followers of the Nation of Islam and other heterodox groups, and the orthodox Muslims. This American dilemma, as Gunnar Myrdal described the racial question in U.S. society before the enforced desegregation became the law of the land, manifested itself in the early encounter between immigrant Islam and local groups in American society.[1]

Different reactions to the challenges and opportunities in American society have been described elsewhere as the Elijahian and Webbian approaches to Islamic *daʿwa* in American society.[2] An approach is Elijahian when it follows Elijah Muhammad's teachings on the effective and rigid separation of the races; it is Webbian when it takes Muhammad Alexander Russell Webb's view of Islam as a color-blind religion that addresses itself to the plight of all persons in this world. As we show later, the evolution of both the immigrant and indigenous segments of the Muslim *umma* (community) in America reveals these two tendencies. Whereas the majority of the indigenous and immigrant Muslims have embraced an Islam that is color-blind, a pocket of heterodox and sometimes orthodox Sunni Muslims still remains, especially among African-Americans, who see Islam as an ideological weapon in the fight against white racism.[3]

In this chapter our attention is focused on the emerging American Muslim community, which is now estimated to be between 3 million and 5 million.[4] The constituent elements of this community are immigrants from virtually all parts of the Muslim World and native-born Americans who converted to the faith of Islam (or as these American Muslims themselves like to put it, "they return to their natural religion [*fitra*]"). The history of the immigrant segment of the emerging Muslim community goes back to the last century, as does the rise of Islam among native-born Americans. But Islam among Americans became a national phenomenon only in the 1960s.

Our task here is to show how challenges facing Muslims in the United States, some of which can be traced back to the nineteenth century, affect the nature of Muslim life in America and the responses of the Muslim *umma* to these challenges. Working on the assumption that the Muslim community is not a monolithic group, and taking note of the fact that the indigenous and the immigrant segments of the Muslim community respond differently to some of the challenges facing Muslims, we argue that the differential rates of assimilation to American culture and society have affected the perceptions and attitudes of the different members of the Muslim community in the United States. This study addresses the following challenges: (a) to *maintain an Islamic identity*; (b) to *project and defend Islamic institutions*; (c) to *build Muslim economic structures*; and (d) to *participate in American political life*.

Challenge to Maintain Islamic Identity

One of the most crucial elements in the history and development of a social group is the maintenance of its identity. American Muslims find themselves in a country where identification is defined politically, linguistically, culturally, and ethnically. An American Muslim is therefore, first of all, a U.S. citizen and for this reason carries an American passport that distinguishes him from nationals of other countries in the Muslim world. He is also looked on by his fellow Americans as a member of a racial group and is further classified culturally and religiously as a member of one of the multiple cultural and religious groups of America. Although American social scientists speak much about the civic religion that now dominates the larger American society, the political and cultural pluralism it gives rise to does not necessarily put an end to the feelings and perceptions of religious identity and affiliation. Because of these sociological realities, one can argue that to define properly and maintain effectively a strong identity the American Muslim must recognize that he lives in four concentric circles. He is a U.S. citizen whose political loyalty is to these United States, and he affirms this, accepting all duties expected of citizens and asserting his rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. The loyal response to any national call to serve in the armed forces and the bold assertion of the freedom of speech to do daʿwa for Islam are two critical examples of the acid test of the Muslim American identity.

But the American Muslim also lives in other circles of identification. If he were not mindful of the nonracial nature of Islam in its ideal form, the American Muslim, by virtue of his early conditioning in a racially conscious society, could easily trap himself in a world of racial consciousness that cuts him off from other Muslims in different racial groups. This is a major challenge to the emerging Muslim umma. It should be pointed out that other American religions are still grappling with this racial problem. Muslim Americans are neither racially homogeneous nor ethnically monolithic. Because of this sociological fact, one challenge to Muslims is to attempt to build the bridges within the Muslim communities necessary to spare the Muslim Americans the racial divide that presently splits the other Abrahamic religions into multiple ethnic/racial islands.

Since one's identity in American society is not only defined by common national origin and racial similarities, a third factor had developed among American Muslims called ethnic consciousness. This ethnic identity within the Muslim community provides a subtler form of differentiation among the immigrant Muslims. It manifests itself as the number of Muslims from abroad increases and the process of self-identification and self-differentiation begins to be felt. For example, as the number of Arabic-speaking members of a Muslim community increases, a natural segmentation or grouping along national lines begins to take place. The Syrians begin to branch off from the Egyptians, and the Saudis from the Moroccans. The same phenomenon is observable among the South Asians. The Bengalis may regroup themselves in distinction to other South Asians as their numbers increase. Although many Muslim observers of the American scene may argue that this splinterization process is an American phenomenon, it can be argued that it is a natural human tendency. Efforts by Muslim leadership need to be directed to the positive use of such ethnic islandization of the Muslim umma through the creation of bridges between leaders and members of such groups.

In the Muslim segment of the African-American community ethnicity is virtually synonymous with raciality. Because of this peculiar situation in the black community, two tendencies have developed among converts to Islam, which can be called the assimilationist and the simulationist tendencies toward Islamization. The assimilationist approach is what makes the American Muslim convert totally change his way of life to the point that he adopts an Islamic name, an Islamic code of dress to reflect the cultural origins of those who introduced him to Islam, an Islamic code of ethics, and an Islamic consciousness, which negates a great deal of what he was previously socialized to accept as American culture. The assimilationist African-American Muslim begins to see his membership in the Muslim community as an alternative, and sometimes superior, identity to his original ethnic identity. Such a person may come to feel that his Islamic identity is in conflict with his American identity. However, other types of assimilationist African-American Muslims are better able to reconcile their Islamic identity with the secular culture that American sociologists called "Americanity." Two other types can be identified here. One is the assimilationist who immerses himself in Islamic culture but still recognizes his African-American identity. Though he now sees himself as a part of a subculture within the African-American community, he identifies totally with that community in matters that are not related to religion. Such a person usually has a Muslim name and is active in African-American community life. The other is the African-American Muslim who assimilates totally into the Islamic culture, but for a variety of reasons opts for the Americanization of his Islamic culture. This type of African-American Muslim, by virtue of his previous positive attitudes toward American culture and American constitutionalism, sees his new Muslim identity as a way of shedding what he perceives as negative characteristics of his past identity in American society that Islam has helped eliminate in his personal life. Such a person usually has a Muslim first name and an American last name.

In contrast to the assimilationists identity are the simulationists who take a totally different view of Islam. Their decision to embrace the new religion is determined largely by utilitarian considerations. They usually see Islam as a political weapon, a strategy for physical and spiritual survival, and a way of life that can be effectively appropriated in their struggle for racial justice and ethnic freedom. The simulationist is determined to simulate everything within the Muslim community as long as his purpose of self-definition is served. Like the assimilationist he adopts an Islamic name, an Islamic code of dress (not an assimilationist mode of dress), and an Islamic orthodox or sometimes heterodox view of the world. What distinguishes the simulationist in his view and use of Islam in American society? Two types of simulationists can be identified. One redefines his African-American identity in such a way that his new religion makes him different and separate from both the Muslim community and his fellow African-Americans of non-Islamic faith. This was the nature of the relationship between the Nation of Islam and the African-American community, on the one hand, and the Muslim community, on the other. This state of affairs continued up to the transformation effected by Imam Warith Deen Muhammad in the late 1970s. The other simulationist group consists of those who embrace Islam as a religion while still insisting strongly on a black nationalism that calls for the unity of all black people regardless of religion.

In looking at the evolution of the Nation of Islam (NOI), one can see the transformation of that movement from a simulationist group with a heterodox interpretation of Islam to a bona fide Muslim group with an assimilationist philosophy of Islamism and Americanism.[5] In fact, one can argue that this movement, which the late Honorable Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975) inherited from Abdul Wali Farad Muhammad Ali (1897–1929?) in the 1930s has spawned elements that can be placed on the spectrum of identity of both the assimilationists and the simulationists. The two major groups that now claim the legacy of Honorable Elijah Muhammad, that is, the former American Muslim Mission of Imam Warith Deen Muhammad and the reconstituted Nation of Islam under Minister Louis Farrakhan, are good examples of these two views of Islam.[6]

The Challenge to Build and Defend Islamic Institutions

Second in importance only to the question of identity is the challenge to build and defend Islamic institutions. Muslims have been aware of this since the early years of their sojourn in the United States. Both Muslim immigrants and native-born Muslims have tackled this question, although historically they have encountered great difficulty. Most of the Muslim immigrants in the early period were not intending to stay in this country. Because they wanted to strike it rich quickly and return home at the earliest opportunity, their minds were not directed toward institution-building. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority were illiterates, without the intellectual and social resources and leadership potential necessary for dealing with the challenges of building institutions. Efforts toward creating Muslim institutions were half-hearted and sporadic. Organizations formed to deal with such needs generally did not last. There were, however, some notable efforts.

In Ross, North Dakota, a small Muslim community thrived for a while. Historians of Islam in America now identify the first *masjid* (mosque) in that city as the oldest in America.[7] Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was the birthplace of the African Muslim Welfare Association of North America (AMWANA)[8] in the late 1920s. We now know that the AMWANA tried to teach Arabic to its members and to provide them with basic instruction on Islam and that a Sudanese Muslim served for a short while as the imam. By the 1930s along the eastern seaboard of the United States and in the Midwest, where Arab, southern European, and other Muslim immigrants settled, the collective efforts of Arabs, Serbians, Turks, Bosnians, Albanians, Ruthenians, and indigenous African-Americans laid the foundations for a Muslim umma. The coming of the Ahmadiyya Movement to America was a major challenge to American Muslims, particularly to those Arab-Americans who felt that their leadership was being usurped by a heterodox group of South Asian Muslims. Its activities in Chicago and Detroit would somehow link some of its early African-American converts to the Nation of Islam.[9] Desipte the existence of such orthodox and not so orthodox manifestations of Islam in the Midwest, the fact remains that advocates of Islam among southern European and Middle Eastern Muslims demonstrated very little strength in their efforts at Muslim institution-building.

The period beginning with the end of World War II serves as a new chapter in such efforts. Two factors can be cited as causes of changes in Muslim self-perception and strategies. The first was the decision of a group of second-generation Arab Muslims and their coreligionists from elsewhere in Dar al Islam to organize a national organization, in large part as a result of the impact of events in the Middle East on Arab-Americans, both Christian and Muslim, and the gradual but strong popularity of Gamal Abdul Nasser in Arab communities in America. Many Arab-Americans began to take pride in their heritage and to pay greater attention to events in that part of the world.[10]

The second factor was the emergence of a small but growing body of students from the Muslim world who started their academic sojourn in the United States in the early 1930s. Most of these early students were adventurous young men from colonized regions of Dar al Islam who aspired to secure places in British or European universities and colleges. After World War II, the rivalry between the United States and the USSR as the dominant superpowers led to a cultural contest that resulted in the establishment of a number of educational exchange programs for students from the newly independent Muslim states of Asia and Africa. This, together with the official policies of the individual Muslim countries to send students here, led to a dramatic increase in the Muslim student population in the United States. There soon developed a tension between the Americanized Arab Muslims and their visiting cousins on the American campuses, particularly in the Midwest, where there is a heavy concentration of Arab-American descendants of earlier immigrants. The Muslim Student Association (MSA) developed out of this situation, and its founding fathers included several students who objected to the brand of Islam identified with the host community of Americanized Muslims.[11]

Faced with Americanized Muslims from the Arab world and elsewhere whose knowledge of Islam was very limited, and determined to deal with the challenges from the dangers of both "Americanized Islam" and heretical brands of Islam of the NOI and Ahmadiyya varieties, the young MSA leadership proceeded to establish chapters. These Muslim students were not originally interested in a large-scale institutionalization drive. Rather, they see their task as that of Muslims in a strange environment where their brief sojourn as seekers of knowledge demanded certain sacrifices.

This original attitude toward the American environment changed as the institutional competition between the MSA and the home-grown Arab Muslim organizations became intense. With a large pool of students from different parts of the Muslim world to recruit from, the MSA soon found itself a national organization with many chapters across the United States and Canada. These chapters would gradually serve as nuclei of an emerging professional class of Muslims. Such a phenomenon has been most evident in big urban areas where the Muslim students have made the successful transition from student life to professional life.[12] The origins of many of the present Muslim national organizations can be traced back to the Muslim Student Association. For the roots of some of the other organizations and institutions now present in American Muslim Society, we must look at the histories of the Nation of Islam, the Ahmadiyya Movement, the various Sufi groups, and the network of Arab Muslim organizations grouped under the Federation of Islamic Organizations (FIA).[13]

The transformation of the NOI by Imam Warith Deen Muhammad, the son and successor of the late Honorable Elijah Muhammad, has significance for Muslim efforts at institution-building on two grounds. First, it brought the movement into the fold of orthodox Islam and made the facilities of this social movement available to many orthodox Muslims who previously were either unwelcome or too aggravated by Elijah's teachings to join the NOI members in developing their institutions. Second, the new teachings of the Imam opened the movement to all Americans, regardless of race, and at the same time made it categorically clear that both the African-American Muslims under Imam Muhammad and the MSA have a common responsibility of safeguarding Muslim identity through institutionalization. Although a variety of circumstances going back to the 1930s led to the present division of labor between immigrants and native-born Americans, events of the late 1970s and early 1980s seem to suggest new ways of constructing bridges between the two communities.

Three different types of persons are now involved in the task of institution-building. The first are the custodians of the MSA heritage. They are now mainly professionals who seek social security and a sense of stability and continuity in the work of their national organizations, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), and their local mosques or Islamic centers affiliated to it. The second are the African-American Muslims in the old NOI who followed Imam Warith Deen Muhammad in 1975. They can now be described as the builders of Islamic institutions that embody the imam's serious attempts to foster simultaneously Islamism and Americanism in the whole society. Third are those small orthodox Muslim groups that have existed in African-American society well before Warith Deen's transformation of the NOI. Many of these Muslims, in their own way, tried hard to build institutions to maintain Islamic identity in the United States. Among others mention should be made of Shaykh al-Hajj Daud Faisal (1891–1980), founder of the Islamic Mission of America in 1928, in Brooklyn, New York; the leaders of the Islamic Party of North America; the leaders of the Ansarulla in New York; the leaders of the Islamic Brotherhood, Inc., in New York, which once published the *Western Sunrise*; and the leaders of the Hanafi Movement.[14]

When we examine the role and contributions of Arab-American Muslims in the creation and maintenance of Islamic institutions in America, we must again remind ourselves that these Muslims embarked on this delicate task of institution-building out of a concern for self-preservation and a quest for cultural and religious continuity. The second- or third-generation immigrant Muslim is different from the MSA rank and file because he is separated from the source of his own culture and religion by both time and space. Because of these factors he sees in his Muslim institutions and organizations an embodiment of his hope to remain Muslim and his will to reconcile his Muslim identity. He hopes to accomplish this as effectively and as successfully as his American Christian and Jewish counterparts. But while working to make his own dream come true, this Americanized Muslim must recognize the presence of both his African-American Muslim neighbor, who is also laboring to construct an Islamic identity and the structures that would give it meaning, and the nonimmigrant student whose Islamic da'wa efforts are either remembered later as those of a transient worker of Islam in the United States or as the first installment of service given by a former MSA member who has graduated into the ranks of the emerging Muslim professionals in America.

The Challenge to Build Muslim Economic Structures

In looking at the points of convergence and divergence within the Muslim community, one finds that the issue of Muslim economic activity in the United States has become a problem for some leaders. There is the issue of Muslim

attitudes toward interest (*riba*). There is the question of ownership of property and the need to remain faithful to the Islamic precepts, which are likely to be subverted by Muslim involvement with the rules and practices of capitalist materialism. There is still the problem of trading in goods such as alcohol, pork, and other items considered forbidden (*haram*) to Muslims. Strict orthodox Muslims can easily find themselves condemned to a marginal existence in the current American social and economic system.

At least three areas can be identified as of mutual interest to the entire Muslim community in the United States. The first area is the collective desire of Muslims to survive as individuals, as families, and as a community, which demands that they participate in their different ways in the American economy. Evidence for the different degrees of involvement with the American economy can be drawn from the activities of the old Nation of Islam the Darul Islam Movement, the Islamic Party of North America, the Ansarulla, the Hanafi, and ultraorthodox Muslim organizations located in American cities. Regardless of their differences, however, all of these groups can be seen as active or passive participants in the American economy. Here these African-American groups join their immigrant brothers in the game of economic survival.

The second area of mutual interest is in the selling of Muslim products or merchandise useful to Muslims. Muslims have found in the creation of their own businesses the best avenues to self-protection and the reduction of cultural trauma from the encounter with American society. Evidence for this point of convergence between the foreign-born Muslims and their native brethren can be gleaned from the number and types of businesses established by these two subgroups in the Muslim community. All these Muslim groups have seen, in the creation of businesses, opportunities to assert themselves and to demonstrate their independence from the majority culture's power of hiring and firing.[15]

The third point of convergence between the immigrants and locals is the common Muslim interest in increasing Muslim cultural presence in American society. This interest, in my view, is inextricably linked to the economic question. By asserting their cultural presence, Muslims hope to win over non-Muslim entrepreneurs to make concessions to their community by not trampling on their sensitivities. It should be stressed, however, that despite this concern small business owners would not like to see competition from other non-Muslim businesses. Such rivals could reduce the independence of Muslim businessmen who specialized in providing services to fellow Muslims. These "neighborhood stores," in areas where Muslims are numerous, are definitely appreciated by Muslims, although only a few Muslims might entertain the illusion that they protect Muslims from the economic penetration of the capitalist market.

The Muslim community diverges on other economic questions. The problem of interest in financial transactions remains the great divide between the rigidly orthodox Muslims and their brethren who are willing to make adjustments to American society. Although it may be dangerous, without a proper sample, to generalize about Muslims all over the United States, one can argue that most of the practicing immigrant Muslims from the Old World and a sizable number of strict orthodox African-American Muslims tend to view interest (riba) with suspicion. These Muslims differ from their more accommodating brethren in two ways. First, they disagree over whether to participate actively in the United States economy and to take or pay interest. Second, they differ in their perceptions of the American Dream. To the strictly orthodox, the American Dream is not defined exclusively in terms of owning creature comforts and material things considered status symbols in the larger society. The Dream, if it has any significant place in his mental horizon, is a symbolic encapsulation of divine blessing (*baraka*) bestowed on American society and its inhabitants by a generous God who grants this favor as a trial.

The accommodationist Muslim embraces the American Dream unhesitatingly. Like his Christian or Jewish neighbors who adjust their religions to face up to the challenges of the secularization of society, he maintains his commitment to his faith but makes minor concessions that more rigidly orthodox coreligionists would not accept. The accommodationist sees his presence in American society as a God-given opportunity to better himself and family and to demonstrate to the larger society that American Muslims do belong, no matter what religious bigots or Muslim fanatics think of his relationship to the American Dream.

When we apply the categories developed earlier in our interpretation of the identity question among Muslims in the United States, and particularly among African-Americans, we find that attitudes toward and opinions on the American economy and the American Dream tend to be defined by how one fits on that spectrum of self-definition. Among the assimilationists who embrace Islam as a total way of life, a negative perception of and attitude toward the United States economy tends to develop. This ideological posture is brought about by the convert's dissatisfaction with American society and by his perception and belief that much of what goes on around him is haram and un-Islamic. Such a convert would join the bandwagon of the Muslim faithfuls who seek alternatives to live with riba (usurious interest) in the United States.[16] The second category of ethnic Americans who embrace Islam are those who totally assimilate themselves into Islamic culture but still recognize their ethnic origins. African-Americans and Latinos of this type do not shy away from participation in the U.S. economy. They definitely embrace the American Dream and see no serious conflict between their religion and the dream.

Opposed to these are the simulationists, earlier described as Elijahian. Concerned with the maintenance of identity separate from the larger community, the simulationists and the rigidly orthodox Muslims share the common attitude of rejection or isolation from the mainstream of society. Though the simulationists may, in the realm of theological purity, be dismissed as heretical or heterodox, in the realm of economic life and activity they share the attitude toward the corporate economic system of the rigidly orthodox Muslim. Both groups believe that any deep and abiding interaction with the larger economic system erodes and undermines the pillars of their separate existence and identity—hence the attempts to promote economic independence through the creation of economic and business networks. In the case of the old NOI, the quest for a separate state was the ultimate solution to the economic problem. The greatest success story of a simulationist drive was that of the old Nation of Islam, which was reported to own $75 million in assets when its spiritual leader passed away.[17]

The Challenge to Participate in American Political Life

Attitudes similar to those about the economy are manifest in the political arena, where the accommodationists have shown no hesitation to participate. During World War II when the followers of Elijah Muhammad and of Sunni Muslim leader Shaykh al-Hajj Daud Faisal of Brooklyn, New York, claimed Islam as the religion that prohibited them from fighting with the U.S. military, American Muslims from the Middle East and southern and east Europe signed up for the war zones, where they would later collect medals of valor.

The African-American Muslims opposed the war because they felt they were being used as cannon fodder by European and American Christians for the settling of their scores. The followers of Shaykh Daoud joined the military in the late 1950s and 1960s.[18] When Imam Warith Deen Muhammad took over the leadership of the NOI he redefined attitudes toward America and her military establishment. Unlike his father, who authored a book entitled *The Fall of America*, Imam Muhammad urged his followers to accept their American as well as their Islamic identity. He moved his father's organization from the simulationist to the assimilationist position by transforming it into a body of men and women who take pride in their American citizenship and remain steadfast in their practice of Islam in American society. Imam Muhammad demolished the "idol of the tribe" by telling his followers that race should no longer determine membership, that their responsibility is to God who brought them to this life. Implicit is his teaching that Muslims should participate in American politics. This theme has been repeated over and over again in the imam's lectures around the country. His reconstituted organization, known respectively as the World Community of Islam in the West and the American Muslim Mission, was later disbanded and authority transferred to the local mosques. But before he effected this radical transformation of the old Nation of Islam, the imam managed to plant the seeds of political participation among his flock around the country.

As a result of Warith Deen's policy changes Muslims have now made some serious efforts to engage in political life in the United States. The Muslim Political Action Committee in Greater Washington received recognition from Washington, D.C., Mayor Marion Barry when in his victory speech he listed Muslims after Christians and Jews as supporters of his successful campaign. Similar efforts have been made elsewhere in the country. The mosques of the American Muslim Mission have created a platform for political education of Muslims interested in politics, and conferences dealing with political issues continue to be held in different locations in the country.

As a result of these changes in attitudes and perceptions, many African-American Muslims with political ambitions no longer hesitate to seek elective office within the American political system. Though the number of Muslim politicians within the larger black community is negligible, there is reason to believe that, as the attitude change becomes more and more deeply felt in Muslim African-America and in the larger Muslim community, some American politicians with Muslim names will begin to make the roster of U.S. elected officials.

But while the orthodox and not so orthodox African-American Muslims stayed away from politics in America because of their perception of and attitudes toward the white society and its controlling establishment, the immigrant Muslims of the first, second, and third generations reacted to the politics of the society differently for an entirely different set of motives and reasons. Coming from countries where little or no democracy prevailed, most of the immigrant Muslims remained apathetic about politics in the United States. This attitude underwent a significant change in the second generation of Muslims because of their greater identification with and assimilation into American culture. Their new sense of patriotism, when skillfully tapped by urban or rural politicians in the Midwestern and Northeastern parts of the country, led to greater politicization of these Muslims. But in making this point, we should hasten to add that though these individuals were Muslims in their names and their identities within their local communities, the politicians who sought their votes appealed to them as American voters of a particular ethnic background. This is an important point, because up until the late 1970s American Muslims did not organize or mobilize themselves as a political force within the American universe of political lobbies.

The earliest efforts of Muslims to seek political recognition from the leadership of this country came from the leaders of the FIA. Composed primarily of descendants of Middle Eastern Arabs, the FIA made some efforts to register the Muslim presence by appealing to President Eisenhower to allow Muslim members of the armed forces to have the letter "I" on their dog tags as Christians have their crosses and the Jews their stars of David. This was accomplished thanks to the efforts of Abdullah Igram, a World War II veteran, so that Muslims now have the letter "I" as their badge of religious identification in the multireligious U.S. military.[19]

In analyzing the question of Muslim involvement in American politics, and the divergent positions taken by the numerous groups within the community, one must also note the changes in the Muslim population that resulted from the immigration of a large number of highly educated Muslims from various parts of the Muslim world and most particularly from the Middle East and South Asia. While the implications of this influx of new and better educated Muslims are not yet properly understood, we can identify some of the factors responsible for changes in attitudes toward the American political process. The first is the emergence of national Muslim organizations committed to the assertion of a Muslim American identity. Unlike the FIA which continues to be perceived in Muslim circles as an organization catering to descendants of Arab Muslims from Lebanon and the Fertile Crescent, the new organizations, such as the Islamic Society of North America, are led and financed by recent immigrant Muslims. They project their organizations as continental societies for all Muslims. Whatever its shortcomings, ISNA still serves as one of the very few Muslim organizations connected to thousands of Muslims around the country. Over the last five years, because of their growing self-confidence and the increase in anti-Muslim harassments and attacks in the media and in the larger American community, some members of the ISNA leadership have now begun to take seriously the option of greater and more active Muslim involvement in the American political process. This option is now being pursued at both the national and local levels. At the national level, there is talk of a national Muslim Political Action Committee.[20]

This decision to engage in political activities in North America has been debated within ISNA since the late 1970s. The idea won majority support in 1986 when the majilis al-shura of ISNA decided to lobby politically for Muslims and to call on all Muslims to become more involved in the American and Canadian political processes.

Thus, the political option is now shared by the followers of Imam Warith Deen Muhammad and the members of the Islamic Society of North America. These two organizations represent a significant portion of the Muslim community, and their involvement in the American political process could give Muslims and issues of interest to them greater visibility.

The identity question is central to the Muslim presence in the United States. The American Muslim can maintain his identity only by holding steadfastly on to the rope of *tawhid* (unity of Allah). This is definitely not an easy task, because numerous forces are at work which are likely to make life difficult. Though Muslims differ on some of the burning issues of American society, however, their sense of unity is evident in their common faith in tawhid, in their collective practice of Muslim rituals and in the expression of solidarity on matters affecting all Muslims living in America. To put this another way, one could say that, though divergence exists in the realm of perceptions of and attitudes toward American society, convergence exists in the realm of rituals and fellow feelings toward one's coreligionists.

Institution-building among Muslims has been slow. This has been due largely to the type of immigrant Muslim who came to America and the slow pace of conversion of native-born Americans who were intellectually and socially equipped to take the leadership in this process. Again it should be stated that those immigrants who could have founded Muslim institutions were primarily interested in making money in the shortest possible time and returning to their respective countries. Related to this is the fact that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Muslims were on the defensive in their relationship with the Western countries, and Muslim immigrants were not psychologically prepared to settle permanently outside of Darul Islam.

Muslim economic structures are beginning to emerge, and their success is going to depend on the availability of capital within the Muslim community nd on the attitudes of Muslim business people toward the American capitalist ystem. The divergent attitudes identified in our classification of different efinitions of the Muslim identity in the United States will have significant fects on the future role of Muslims in the economy. Assimilationist Muslims ill fare very much like assimilationist members of other religious traditions perating within the U.S. economy. They will develop intellectual justifications r dealing with banks that charge interest and with home-building companies at include interest in their mortgage rates. The simulationists, on the other and, will in the coming years create economic structures that are faithful to lamic economics and reassuring to those who believe in God and the Sunna f Prophet Muhammad.

The rise in Muslim self-confidence and the increase in the number of uslims in the country will lead assimilationist Muslims to participate more nd more in the American political system. Related to this is the fact that the ends in interreligious relations in America and the Muslim world could affect ot only the image of Muslims in the United States, but also their self-erception in American society. The future of Muslim survival in American ociety is inextricably linked to the future of religious pluralism in this country. ny radical alteration in this pattern could threaten not only Muslim Ameri-ans but all other minorities who are targeted for discrimination. If the present nd recent past are significant guides to the future, it is possible to hope that lam as a minority religion has a promising future and Muslims will be as well djusted in the coming years as any other religious minority. Their religion will in Christianity and Judaism as the third branch of the Abrahamic tradition. ere this to occur, Will Herberg's statement on American religion could be mended to read that being American means that one may be a member of the hristian, Jewish, Muslim, or any of the other religious traditions in American ociety.

Notes

1. For some insights on the racial situation in the United States at the time Gunner yrdal wrote his book, see his *An American Dilemma*, Anniv. Ed. (New York: Harper Row, 1964).

2. See my editorial in the *American Journal of Islamic Studies* 1: 1 (spring 1984), -ix.

3. Included in this category are groups like the Ansarullah; the Islamic Party of orth America; the Islamic Brotherhood, Inc., of New York; the Darul Islam Movement; nd the Institute of Islamic Involvement in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. For details n their views of Islam in America, read the numerous publications of the Ansars, the ack issues of *al-Islam*, *The Western Sunrise*, and *Jihadul Akbar*, and *Vision*.

4. Although there is no agreement on the number of Muslims in the United States, widely cited figure is 3 million. For latest attempts at tabulations, see Yvonne Haddad, *lamic Values in the United States: A Comparative Study* (New York: Oxford Univer-ty Press, 1987). Arif Ghayur, "Muslims in the United States: Settlers and Visitors," *nnals* ASPSS 454 (March 1981).

5. For some treatment of the history of the Nation of Islam in the United States, see C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961); E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962). For details on the transformation of the Nation of Islam, see Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslim* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1984); Akbar Muhammad, "Muslims in the United States: An Overview of Organizations, Doctrines and Problems," in *The Islamic Impact*, ed. Yvonne Haddad, Bryon Haines and Ellison Findly (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), pp. 195–218.

6. For a good survey of events within the NOI since the Honorable Elijah Muhammad passed away in 1975, see *The African Mirror*, August/September 1979.

7. See the chronology of major historical events for Muslim America in Yvonne Haddad, *A Century of Islam in America* [Occasional Paper No. 4] (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Islamic Affairs, 1986), p. 10.

8. See my "Growth of Islam in America," *The Saudi Gazette*, October 19, 1983.

9. Richard B. Turner, "The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam in America," Unpublished paper, p. 3.

10. Abdo El-Kholy, *The Arab Moslem in America* (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1966), p. 48.

11. For more information on the MSA and its activities, see back issues of *al-Ittihad* and *Islamic Horizons*.

12. See Sulayman S. Nyang and Mumtaz Ahmad, "The Muslim Intellectual Emigre in the United States," *Islamic Culture* 59 (1985), 277–90.

13. See Lincoln, *The Black Muslims*; Turner, "The Ahmadiyya Movement"; El-Kholy, *The Arab Moslem*.

14. For details on the activities of these Muslim groups in the African-American community, see Sulayman S. Nyang and Robert J. Cummings, *Islam in the United States* (forthcoming), especially chapter on "Islam and the Black Experience in the U.S.A."

15. In a recent issue of the *Islamic Horizons* (November 1987), one Nahid Khan writes: "After years of watching both local and national politicking from the sidelines, Muslims are beginning to realize that it's time for the community to make its entrance into the political arena. In moving in this direction, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) has recently filed with the Federal Election Commission to form a Political Action Committee (PAC) and is now awaiting approval, according to the ISNA Secretary General Iqbal Unus." Khan adds that the decision of ISNA is part of "a scant group of Muslim communities and organizations who have already started to test the political waters." He identified the United Muslims of America of California, the Texas-based All-American Muslim Political Action Committee (AAMPAC), and the League of Muslim Voters in Chicago. For details see my "Muslim Minority Business Enterprise in the United States," *The Search* 3: 2 (spring 1982).

16. The Ansarullah Movement and members of ultraconservative Muslim groups fall under this category. Such persons usually do not like the idea of paying interest on home mortgages, interest on credit cards, and on other ribaic activities.

17. See Linda Jones, "Nations Apart," *The Detroit News*, *Michigan*, July 17, 1988.

18. Interviews with Bedria Saunders, Bilal Abdul Rahman and his wife Rakiya in Brooklyn, New York (spring 1982).

19. Abdo El-Kholy, quoting an F.I.A. document, maintains that Muslims in the U.S. army were relegated to the residual X category. See his *The Arab Moslem*, p. 46.

20. See *Islamic Horizons*, November 1987, p. 13.