

# Special Report



## The Impact of 9/11 on Muslim American Young People

National & Religious Identity Formation in the Age of Terrorism & Islamophobia



# MPAC SPECIAL REPORT

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## The Impact of 9/11 on Muslim American Young People: Forming National & Religious Identity in the Age of Terrorism and Islamophobia

### Executive Summary

Fostering effective engagement with Muslim youth in America requires understanding their priorities and aspirations on the one hand and potential causes for their dissent and disenfranchisement on the other.

Much government and media attention has been paid to the phenomena of radicalization and extremism, but has left largely untouched the question of root causes and the importance of common definitions. There must be a clear distinction between the radicalization that leads to violent rebellion and the radical rhetoric commonly expressed on college campuses that represents dissent and disenfranchisement.

One key social goal is to include the many diverse experiences of Muslim life in America in public discourse on integration and ghettoization. The more narrow the orbit of acceptance is toward young Muslims who are traversing the various stages of adolescence toward becoming young professionals, the more likely we will begin to see serious cases of radicalization that can evolve into trends.

The frontline in fighting extremism is the theological front, fighting bad theology with good theology, and combating the

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theology of death with the theology of life. The mass push towards religiosity is not the golden answer; rather, avenues must be fashioned that allow each young person to chart his or her own course while reaching for guidance and support from the broader community.

The promotion of the clash of civilizations theory exacerbates radicalization, in which each community is reduced to a uni-modal/singular classification that necessarily defines itself in contrast to the “other”. In fact, such analysis is shared with the extremists of Muslim camps who insist that the winning world narrative, in which there exists either an abode of peace that is inhabited by Muslims and is constantly threatened by the rest of the world or an abode of war. Islamophobia is a root cause of radicalization. Groups of young people in the West have always shown their dissatisfaction with elements of greater society by “divesting” from or “disowning” the broader public or rejecting how the broader public sees its collective “self.”

Major recommendations outlined in the special report include:

- Developing a support infrastructure for Muslim students in U.S. college campuses
- Creating a U.S. government Inter-Agency Muslim American Youth Advisory Board of leaders and young professionals
- Deterring Islamophobia in the media through broad scale ad campaigns (e.g. Ad Council commercials supporting and showing the value of diversity and pluralism).

MPAC also argues that polling data of Muslim Americans in general and Muslim youth in particular is deficient and calls for a Center for Muslim American studies to track attitudes and trends within the community.

## **Introduction**

The following is a brief position paper that attempts to do two things: first, frame the issues related to the radicalization of Muslim youth in the West in a way that is consistent with realities on the ground and emphasizes the distinction between the American and European experiences; and second, provide a series of recommendations to Muslim American institutions, government and the media in their efforts to engage young Muslims in a healthy partnership of respect and equality with the goal of enhancing their integration and reducing the possibility for radicalization.

Every young college student – regardless of race, class or gender – is exposed to a spectrum of philosophies in college. We must make a distinction, however, between healthy challenging of the status quo in current affairs and violent expressions of rebellion. Healthy challenges to the status quo involve rigorous, perhaps even caustic, debates about ideas but are essentially characterized by a willingness to engage in open discussions.

Moreover, radical views are not foreign to mainstream political thought expressed by historic notables such as former US Senator Barry Goldwater: “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And moderation in pursuit of justice is no virtue.” Goldwater, who was from Arizona, challenged Lyndon B. Johnson as the Republican nominee in 1964. Unfortunately,

many right-wing groups misread Goldwater adopting a form of extremism that works to silence the voices of others without meaningful dialogue or debate.

When law enforcement or anti-academic freedom groups (e.g. Campus Watch) engage in what some have called “thought policing”, many young Muslim Americans feel alienated. To criticize the lack of free expression in the Muslim world while discouraging the same in the U.S. is perceived to be hypocritical or at least incongruent. As a result Muslim American youth can end up resisting or distrust mainstream political and civic participation leaving them vulnerable to fringe radical groups.

### **On the Question of Radicalization**

Much has been written and discussed globally about the reality and possibility of “homegrown terrorism” in the West, The bombings in London and Madrid and recently foiled plots in Canada added to the concern. The radicalization of young Western Muslims, while on the minds of many, is void of thoughtful analyses that explain core dynamics within Western societies and how they uniquely affect youth within extremely diverse Muslim communities. Too frequently, communities that are excluded from conversations tend to use that exclusion as an excuse to withdraw from any discussion on religious reform and civic engagement.

The radicalization of young people is sourced in a sense of exclusion from the mainstream of those accepted and embraced by the community at large. Similarly for young Western Muslims, the ability to reconcile the various streams that flow into the creation of one’s identity is central to achieving that sense of belonging that is required for one to truly have an allegiance to their surrounding society. It is important to note that this paper does not argue for an artificially induced sense of patriotism or affiliation; rather, we are attempting to identify the contours of conversations around healthy and genuine integration that authenticates the role of young Muslims in American society. As we witnessed the “French Youth Riots” of last year, we in the U.S. kept reaching back to our memory of the emancipation and civil rights experiences in our own history to think, “people don’t burn what they perceive to be their own.” It is only when one associates with an oppressive, powerful and over-bearing “other” than the only means of recourse is expressed in violent and unhealthy means.

As a contribution to this conversation, MPAC finds it important to highlight our approach to the subject. MPAC is heavily involved in counter-terrorism efforts in cooperation with national and local law enforcement agencies as well as the equally important efforts of counter-extremism at the grassroots of the Muslim American community with a focus on youth. We have also been engaged with European Muslim communities and governments in numerous arenas on both sides of the Atlantic as well as in Muslim-majority countries in an effort to assess the environments that produce such extremism. MPAC is also committed to building a future generation of leaders and sees the importance of engaging young people in planning for the future as a central theme to positive religious, social and political work around the country.

To some degree, the problems of older generations have been inherited by second- and third-generation Muslim Americans. To the extent that there is an “Arab” mosque and a “Pakistani” mosque, there will unfortunately arise Sunday programs and full-time schools that are similarly insular and segregated. And the opposite is also true, that mosques with diverse congregations and an insistence on inclusive perspectives to diverse perspectives on Islamic legal doctrines have succeeded in creating daughter organizations that emulate such diversity. An example is the relationship between the Islamic Center of Southern California and the Blue-Ribbon Award winning sister schools of the New Horizon School System.

Perhaps it helps to offer a glimpse of the conclusion to this brief look into the reality of life for Muslim American youth before proceeding further. Hopes are high for the coming generations of Muslim Americans in their ability to “bridge” much of the divide that exists between Muslims and the West. MPAC believes that Muslim Americans should lead the reform discourse within arenas of authentic and well-grounded sources of Islam. The work of Muslim Americans requires the building of cadres of young scholars that are organic to the American experience but accepted as a component of the global Muslim community of scholars. Muslim Americans across the country are for the most part still plagued with the crisis of the imported ideologies, to be distinguished from legitimate and relevant discourse within the American socio-political context while adhering to the principles of Islam and the juristic processes of mainstream Islamic political thought. The imported ideology, whether employed by immigrant or indigenous Muslim leaders, fills a vacuum of religious leadership necessary to address compelling issues facing Muslims, young and old, in their quest to create a vibrant, positive role in America. Young Muslims need religious leaders that understand their contexts and speak to what invites and excites their active participation in the public square both through Muslim and non-Muslim American institutions.

In March 2007, Charles Allen, Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis in the Department of Homeland Security testified before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs on the “Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland”. There, he said, “Charismatic leaders naturally attract individuals willing to emulate their actions based on their views of the world. Within a radical context, the engaging personalities of the leaders enable them to instill a brand of extreme ideology in impressionable individuals, particularly the youth.”

This has been a phenomenon that is well documented in Europe, in the personalities of Abu Hamza Al Masri, a Muslim cleric in the United Kingdom serving a seven-year prison sentence for soliciting murder and inciting racial hatred, or Omar Bakri, a convert was recently arrested in the UK for galvanizing and radicalizing young Muslim Brits. We do not see such a group forming amongst youth here in the U.S. In fact, the Muslim American community at large has rejected any militancy within the mainstream community and there is no indication that any Al-Qaeda-like movement has gained traction in America.

In recent decades, however, some Muslim groups drew young people into communities that attempted to live self-sufficiently from the broader society surrounding it with the intent of imitating a living a Puritan life. We should remember that in the trajectory of American history, the idea of “separating” as a race or a religion from the larger society, has been seen

repeatedly as an option for the disenfranchised. It is important to emphasize that in the U.S. experience, none of these social manifestations represented a terrorist threat but were an expression of marginalization, even frustration with current foreign and domestic policies of the U.S. government.

This type of activity should be distinguished from young people who approach a college experience and find their social circles to be focused on the Muslim Student Association (MSA) life on campus and live an “Islam-flavored” and integrated college experience. Many young Muslim Americans meet other young, healthy, “normal” young Muslim Americans for the first time in college. This leads to, as in other minority communities, the tendency of “likes” to congregate, as we see in fraternities, clubs, sports teams and others arenas of campus life. As a response to the occasional radicalization that we see, we propose in this paper, that more resources go to amplifying the healthy aspects of these on-campus congregations of Muslims while ameliorating the marginalizing factors of such communities.

For Europe, radicalization has advanced to the extent that self-imposed ghettoization has taken root, resulting in a form of withdrawal from mainstream society. Robert Leiken describes the level of rejection of Muslims in France in his article, “Europe’s Angry Muslims” in *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2005):

As the French academic Gilles Kepel acknowledges, "neither the blood spilled by Muslims from North Africa fighting in French uniforms during both world wars nor the sweat of migrant laborers, living under deplorable living conditions, who rebuilt France (and Europe) for a pittance after 1945, has made their children ... full fellow citizens." Small wonder, then, that a radical leader of the Union of Islamic Organizations of France, a group associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, curses his new homeland: "Oh sweet France! Are you astonished that so many of your children commune in a stinging *naal bou la France* [f--k France], and damn your Fathers?"

So, why are some young Western Muslims influenced by groups that articulate their frustrations with the “situation as they see it” by developing confrontational ideologies and in some instances engaging in violence? What are the elements of how we approach race, religion, identity and integration in the West that inhibit the ability of young Muslims to feel part and parcel of the greater community? After we attempt to gain a handle on those core issues, we will offer some recommendations for various elements of public life in narrowing Muslim American contributions towards success.

### **Identity and Idea: Who’s Clashing and Who Benefits?**

MPAC has always believed that the core of any analysis about the situation of the Muslim American community, particularly its youth, should be built upon an assessment as to the health and vibrancy of the Muslim American Identity. Since the early 1980s, MPAC and its affiliate institutions have focused resources and efforts on building a community of Muslims in America that are forward-looking and contributing components of American pluralism.

This and similar Muslim American experiences across the nation aim to build communities that are organic to the global community of Muslims and also at “home” in the American project.

It is important at the outset to say that we at MPAC do not believe in a clash of civilizations, in which each community is reduced to a uni-modal/singular classification that necessarily defines itself in contrast to the “other.” In fact, we have come to believe that such analysis is shared with the extremists of Muslim camps, who insist that there is an abode of peace that is inhabited by Muslims and is constantly threatened by the rest of the world, or the abode of war. As illustrated above, groups of young people in the West have always shown their dissatisfaction with elements of greater society by “divesting” from or “disowning” the broader public or how the broader public sees its collective “self.”

The “clash” narrative fits that youthful intuition to extremes. For instance, some disenfranchised youth feel that American policy supports and allows oppression of Muslim globally through war and occupation. This narrative further argues that any participation in the political process is banned because it facilitates the *haram* (forbidden) or that it produces a series of injustices adversely affecting fellow Muslims globally.

This is a uniquely American narrative. Remember Malcolm X used to tell alcohol-addicted youths that even the liquor bottle has a government seal on it: “Every time you open another bottle, you benefit the very government that brought it to your community.” A similar analysis is used across U.S. campuses when we see young Muslims who boycott multi-national corporations they associate with U.S. imperialism. Another phenomenon of this conceptual barrier to integration is the extremist discourse on the role of women in the public square, namely, young Muslims who have adopted perspectives on where and how a Muslim women can engage with others limiting her sphere of existence to the presence of other Muslim women and children. The extremist will argue that because of Islam’s strictness on the role of women that a clash of civilizations is the most applicable analysis thus obligating the young Western Muslim family of communities to disassociate with the broader American community. This brings the ghettoization of European Muslim realities to our shores and can be dangerous.

As Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen recently noted in his book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, an identity that is built primarily on the “dialectics of a colonized mind”, in which one is obsessed and overcome by a relationship to the “powerful other” is one of limited horizons. Muslim American national, regional and local institutions need a paradigmatic shift away from a so-called victim mentality in order to effectively guide their most important resource, young people, through this multi-prong maze of questions and challenges to a place that allows the growth of plural, diverse and authentically American experiences.

When we in the West engage the conversation about bridging the apparent divide with the so-called Muslim world, we launch into platitudes that are based on misinformation and a

general ignorance of the “other.” Recently, Dalia Mogahed of the Gallup World Poll<sup>1</sup> and Dr. John Esposito of Georgetown University conducted a polling project that accounted statistically for the opinions of 1 billion Muslims and their opinions of the West. Based on more than 9,000 interviews in nine Muslim countries, they found that Muslim radicals have more in common with their moderate brethren than is often assumed. The data presented thus far presents a startling challenge to those who argue a “clash of civilizations” analysis to explain much of what we are presented with on our television screens nightly. The study found that among those who believed 9/11 was justified, not a single response focused on Islam or Islamic justifications; rather, the totality of those offering reasons focused on political and economic disparities that are attributed to injustices by the powerful West against Muslims. Also, among those who believed that 9/11 was not justified, the overwhelming majority of respondents invoked religion and religious law in their responses with comments invoking God’s anger at the taking of an innocent life and the Prophet’s tradition in such situations. The fact that moderates are invoking more Islam than the radicals indicates an analysis and a reality that escape the vast majority of Western analyses currently being negotiated.

As to the role of religion in the daily life of those polled, 91% of moderates and 92% of radicals responded affirmatively, and 59% of moderates as well as 56% of radicals attended a religious service in the last 7 days. Not only is religion a non-factor in ideological approaches to radicalism but religious institutions don’t appear to serve as gathering spots for violent radicals. We should remember that these numbers apply to Muslims in 43 countries and they give us a view into the make-up of our national adversaries. These numbers tell us about radicalization and extremism and give us hints about what to look for here at home. In much of the analysis of the media, we see how vilification of places of worship and gatherings among Muslims in the West fuels much of the fear and ignorance that engulfs the conversation about the identity of young Western Muslims. This leads to further perceptions of disenfranchisement that feed into the cycle of radicalization that has led to violence throughout the U.K. and other parts of Europe.

The inability to realize that religion is the answer to radicalization, that only a good and authentic theology can overcome a zealous and fraudulent one, has led us down a slippery slope of conflating religious conservatism for radicalism or extremism. And it is central to why we are not addressing the issue of the radicalization of Western youth correctly. Muslim American institutions and communities are tasked with offering authentic alternatives for young Muslims with a serious interest in religion and religiosity to ensure that such energy is catalyzed for good by those with the requisite knowledge. Otherwise, misdirected street preachers drawing the attention of coming generations with their abundant charisma and eloquence will gain momentum. Secularizing the sentiment of young, active, engaged and religious Muslim American youth is not the answer. Ensuring that on-campus avenues exist for these students is beneficial to the nation and for young Muslims in particular, even those

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<sup>1</sup> Mogahed, D. and Esposito, J. (Nov 2006). “What Makes a Muslim Radical?” Gallup World Poll. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=3637](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3637)

who are not religious. It is crucial that we engage in the well-being of Muslim students and their healthy integration into the larger fabric of American life.

Finally, among both moderates and radicals, the most admired quality of the West is technological advancement and the second is a three-way tie between liberty, democracy and freedom of speech. When asked what the West can do to improve its relations with the global Muslim community, both radicals (39%) and moderates (36%) responded with “respect Islam”. Among radicals, 50% believe that moving towards democracy will help Arab/Muslim societies progress while only 35% of moderates agree. So it is not that they hate us for who we are. They clearly don’t hate us for our freedom; rather, they seem to like us for our freedom, according to these numbers from Gallop.

### **Moderates v. Extremists: The Front Lines of the War on Terrorism**

The word “moderate” is considered *persona non grata* among young Western Muslims because, to them, it indicates a lack of sophistication of the person speaking. In social circles of very reasonable, very well-integrated young people, the word moderate —is interchangeable with sell-out, white-washed, or “I’m a moderate because I drink beer moderately,” or in a political context, a moderate Muslim is a self-hating Muslim or a non-Muslim. That is why it is important for us to offer some thoughts on this language and offer suggestions that will not repel the group we need most to fight the realities of extremism, young people.

Much of the global conversation about Islam and Muslims is focused on labeling the camps engaged in the intra-Muslim or intra-Ummah conversation about extremism and moderation. It is important, at the outset, to offer a definition of moderation that we at MPAC have supported since our inception in 1988. A moderate is not gauged by the political ideas and ideologies that she/he holds; rather a moderate is clearly defined by the Qur’an and the tradition of the Prophet. If acquiescence to or active support of American global interest were the test, then characters such as Saddam Hussein and Usama bin Laden would each have qualified at different junctures in their careers. The litmus tests for moderation, rather, revolve around topics such as the role of women in the public square and in leadership roles within Muslim institutions, the impermissibility of the use of violence as a means for political change, the acceptance of disparate segments of the Muslim American community, the rights of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority societies and the role of critical thinking in building the character of a Muslim. Moderation also has to do with how one reads the Qur’an and applies the model of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Extremists lack juristic discipline, a problem that plagued even the founder of the Wahhabi school of thought, Mohamed ibn Abd Al Wahhab himself, according to *The Great Theft* by Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadel. For example, extremists will universalize Qur’anic text that was revealed for specific historical situations that the Prophet (pbuh) faced in an attempt to increase the window of permissibility in a variety of social and legal arenas.

One can be authentically religiously conservative and be a moderate just as one can be religiously liberal and be plagued by the illness of radicalism. Any analysis that assumes that

those who are more religious/conservative/observant are more likely to slip into radicalism or extremism is based on faulty and incorrect reasoning. Such a perception is based on Western (primarily Christian) notions of struggle between faith and reason or the tug between the “Church” and the state, both of which are at best tangential conversations for the majority of Muslim theologians. It is a fallacy to lead the public to believe that the more conservative a Muslim is the less likely he is to pick up a book to confirm a perspective or reason through religious quandaries in a modern world. Surely, the protesters that responded to the Danish cartoons or the Pope’s comments do not pray more often per day than those that stayed at home and watched the chaos on television.

Such analysis also excludes and offends those needed most in any fight or effort against extremism, namely, those with the requisite Islamic knowledge to counter the arguments of those who don the cloak of Islam. Bad/fraudulent/antiquated theology can only be fought with good/authentic/relevant theology. One cannot approach a young Muslim who has adopted an extremist innovation of Islamic teachings with an invitation to “modernize” or secularize, rather the only effective alternative is to appeal to the word of God in the Qur’an and the authentically narrated traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). This is why Muslims must be at the apex of any counter-extremism efforts that are aimed at assessing and remedying some of the ideological and theological maladies that feed a sense of siege and exclusion felt by many young Western Muslims.

The reality described above must be balanced with the need for enlarging the umbrella that gathers the many diverse experiences of Muslim life in America. The more narrow the orbit of acceptance is toward young Muslims who are traversing the various stages of adolescence toward becoming young professionals, the more likely we will begin to see serious cases of radicalization that can spin out into trends. In arguing that we fight theology with theology, we are not encouraging that a mass push towards religiosity is the golden answer; rather, avenues must be fashioned that allow each young person to chart their own course while reaching for guidance from the broader community.

We in the West sometimes forget the reality is that the front lines in the effort are dependent on which side will win the day in the intra-Muslim struggle for the soul of Islam. Sometimes, the tone that Western leaders and commentators strike works to bolster the ability of the enemy to authenticate their message to target markets. For instance, there seems to be an insistence among those who are least knowledgeable about Islamic issues to use Arabic words to describe phenomena. A good example is the use of the word Jihadist, which is translated as holy warrior by two camps, the terrorists and the Islamophobes of the West. First, we should point out that the translation of holy war (*al harb al muqadassa*) does not exist in any chapter of the Qur’an or in the compilations of the authentically narrated traditions of the Prophet (pbuh). Second, the use of such terminology by Western commentators ratifies the claims of the terrorists that they are acting within the guidelines of what is permissible in Islamic law. This serves to amplify the Islamic identity and legitimacy of the criminals and secularizing the appearance of the vast majority of moderates, when in fact we should be working with partners to do the exact opposite.

As a global community of moderates, we should be working to ostracize extremists and extremism for the mainstream orthodoxy of all faiths in an effort to de-bunk their legitimacy as representatives of the broader faith communities. A similar problem occurs when we link Islam to the actions of criminals, such as President Bush's unfortunate mistake when he used the phrase "Islamic Fascists", prompting the Muslim American community to ask – what is so Islamic about their Fascism?

We should strike a similar note of caution when we invoke rhetoric or terminology that serves to reinforce a clash of civilizations narrative for the global conflicts we see. For instance, "they hate us for our freedom," invokes an enemy that is anti-West for no reason other than its belief system, disregarding a good deal of history and analysis that informs the listener of where the real battle lines are drawn ideologically. A final example is the insistence on the use of the term "the Muslim World," which when used by Western commentators is usually used as a proxy for the Middle East or Arab world, both of which identify communities based on ethnicity/race. A better and more accurate phrase is "the Global Muslim Community", which represents the wildly diverse 1.3 billion people only 20% of whom are Arabs. When we speak of a global Muslim community, we speak of places like Indonesia, India, Malaysia, China, Central Asia, Western Muslim communities, Latin American and Latino communities etc. When we invoke this diversity as a blessing of God and a catalyst for building these bridges, we will necessarily bypass sticky situations that narrow our scope rather than enlarge it. By doing so, we enfranchise all members of this community to become stakeholders in this important conversation and contributors to most of the available solutions.

### **Islamophobia: A Root Cause of Radicalization**

The ability of young Muslims to find the peace of mind and space to engage issues related to their identities and contributions to their nation depends upon the ability of the larger society to respond to the movement of folks that are determined to exclude Islam and Muslims from the larger discussion. There is an upsurge of hate websites produced and proliferated by unqualified writers who incestuously share misinformation to create webs of distortion in the media, the halls of Congress and on the Internet. A core element of addressing issues of the radicalization of young Western Muslims is to begin to take the issue of Islamophobia seriously. Part of taking it seriously is the need to understand the various aspects and actors of the American Islamophobe movement that shape public conversations about Islam and Muslims. One should work with a rule, the more negative the image of Islam is in the public media, the more fertile the soil will be for the radicalization of Muslim youth throughout the country. Young people react to perceived threats upon their identity by amplifying the most noticeable anti-social elements, as symbols of their independence and chosen identity. And under such circumstances, if society is not well educated in constructive responses guided by a competent Muslim American community, the results can be devastating.

It is generally agreed that Islamophobia is sourced in two primary phenomena, one is the overwhelming ignorance of Western society of other non-traditional perspectives (let alone

the Muslim “other”- we use “other” too much and its too vague-don’t know how to fix this though), and second is an organized orchestra of hate against Western Muslims. It should be noted that most anti-Muslim/Islam rhetoric that we see hangs hidden, comfortably poised between both attitudes. As to the first and more innocent, it is clear that there is a deficiency in the American public square with regard to Islam and Muslims. Recently, CNN Headline News host Glenn Beck, seemingly in a pool of awkwardness, asked newly-elected Congressman from Minnesota Keith Ellison whether his allegiance was “to the enemy” or to the United States. Beck felt the need to explain that his question stems from consistent calls to his radio talk show asking him to inquire with Ellison on his patriotism during the interview. Earlier that week, Congressman Virgil Goode of Virginia offered that if Mr. Ellison was not interested in swearing his oath on a Bible, then “he should go back to where he came from.” In response, Mr. Ellison ran to the Library of Congress and employed the service of a Qur’an donated by Thomas Jefferson for his ceremony, standing as the first black representative from the state of Minnesota and the first Muslim member of congress and he was sworn in by the first woman speaker of the House.

Now that we have offered a couple of instances of Islamophobia that we are willing to reluctantly ascribe to a general ignorance of Islam/Muslims, the following is an eclectic selection of utterances that might better fit in our second category. Last year, Colorado Congressman and immigration/border hawk Tom Tancredo suggested on a radio show that one option for those interested in sending a message to the terrorists is to “bomb Mecca.” General William Boykin has comfortably held on to his position in the Department of Defense (DOD) and his reputation for being the only U.S. DOD official to issue a fatwa during the War on Terror when he proffered that the enemy’s God is an “Idol/Moon” god and that he is fighting on behalf of the real Lord.

The second offering of instances might fairly be deemed on the border of the two categories of Islamophobia due to ignorance or Islamophobia via organized movement. There is, however, a well-known group of commentators and public figures who adopt various shades of hate and antagonism to the Muslim American experience or in some cases Islam itself. What is interesting about this movement is it is closest to the European Islamophobia model. In Europe, the public conversation is sourced in the perceived culture clash symbolized by things like *niqab* (face cover worn by a small number of Muslim women) in the public square. Many times, conversations about immigration and integration in European countries such as Germany tend to end up at a juncture called “Western Values.” And the investigation of note becomes whether those who come from Muslims/Arab backgrounds are able to relieve themselves of those qualities and belief systems that render them incompatible with liberal Western values, such a conversation is rare here in the U.S. Islamophobia in Europe is rooted in arguing that Islam is barbaric, outdated (i.e. in need of reformation) and oppressive to minorities and women. A good example of this is a book entitled “Londonistan”, written by a mainstream British journalist named Melanie Phillips, with a back-of-the-book endorsement from Daniel Pipes, representing a budding relationship between the movements across the Atlantic to ensure an exclusion of Islam and Muslims from the mainstream of both societies.

Phillips and her comrades receive mainstream *carte blanche* in the U.S. arena with talks at institutions like the Heritage Foundation and massive media exposure. The main thrust of the book is that “multiculturalism” has eroded British society and London is looking more and more like Pakistan and less like Europe, with the warning to American readers that all of it is heading our way. In the U.S., rather, the Islamophobe movement does a much better job of couching the conversation in security terms particularly since 9/11. We at MPAC have consistently argued that much of the hate disguised in counterterrorism is counterproductive, and the anti-Islamic rhetoric will eventually result in impeding our national security and ability to defend the homeland.

### **European Multiculturalism v. American Pluralism: From Separation to Coexistence**

One of the founding fathers of Muslim American intellectual thought, Dr. Sulayman Nyang, argues that the Muslims of America are the children of the Cold War whereas the Muslims of Europe are the children of a colonial experience. This, argues Nyang, should be the starting point for any analysis that attempts to compare the European and American realities.

As a result of our constant interaction and engagement with European Muslim leaders from almost all Western European nations, we at MPAC have reached the following analysis. While we are cautious to stray toward generalizations, we see that European Muslim communities are socially and economically excluded from the mainstream of life in most European societies.

Indicators of such include high percentages of Muslims in prison populations, high unemployment rates among educated working-age individual (primarily youth) and stunningly ghettoized social networks and communities that are isolated and at times live parallel lives to the larger non-Muslim society. Exclusion in those arenas is somewhat remedied by marginal political success at integration. In the U.K., for instance, the first Muslim Member of Parliament (MP) held his position approximately 100 years ago, whereas in the U.S. the first Muslim congressman was elected this year. Conversely, by most estimates an Muslim American family makes a yearly income that is either at or above that of the non-Muslim American family. So the socio-economic narrative in the U.S. is much healthier primarily due to immigration patterns that landed highly educated Muslim professionals that positioned following generations for high academic success.

The Muslim American identity rests on the belief that there is neither dissonance nor friction between the founding principles of the United States and the founding principles of Islam. To this end, we believe that one can be fully Muslim and fully American simultaneously without compromising any of what makes each individual uniquely Muslims and uniquely American. This construction of an identity is made possible by a variety of factors that are unique to the American context and distinguish it from the European one. It should be noted that vanguard academics, such as Tariq Ramadan, have ventured deeply into conversations about the construction of a European Muslim identity, but such discourse has yet to be mainstreamed and actualized.

It is clear that Muslim Americans need not only engage questions relating to Islamic identity, but also ones relating to American identity. That is, what does it mean to be an American? Interestingly Samuel Huntington, most known for his article, then book, on the clash of civilizations offers us a strong starting point for our investigation. In his recent book *Who Are We?*, Mr. Huntington engages in an all out assault on Latinos, particularly Mexican Americans and their “inability” to assimilate into the American pluralism because “their children dream in Spanish.” In this text, Huntington defines American Identity as Anglo-Protestant identity, and deems all else a “deconstructionist” movement, that is an effort to take away from what America really is. So “hyphenated identities” to Mr. Huntington such as Asian-American, Jewish-American, Muslim-American, etc. are merely labels that take away from both the White-ness and Protestant-ness of the American narrative.

Needless to say, few people of color in the U.S. agree with this definition of what makes America or what constructs American identity. Rather, the usual definition is that American identity is a variety of “ways of being”, all of which adhere to the founding principles of our nation. Most Americans disagree with Huntington and believe that to be American is not to be associated with a demographic, color, race or language, rather it is to invest oneself into the American project and be a contributing component of her self-betterment and change. One might argue that Mr. Huntington’s analysis passes as mainstream analysis in many corners of this conversation in Europe.

It should be noted that Mr. Huntington and others who maintain this analysis actually help the integration of the Muslim American community because Muslim American youth are better able to contextualize their challenges today with those of other communities before us. Young people see the various civil rights movements since the beginning of our nation on a continuum that includes Muslim Americans and will, in the future, include other segments of the American pluralism. At this juncture, it is important to offer some thoughts on the community that young Muslims face on this side of the pond, we will attempt here to present a quick look at three factors that are most relevant to this discussion.

First, there is a significant distinction in the demographic make-up of the Muslim American community. According to most scholars and leaders of the community, it is believed that among the approximately 6 million Muslims of America, about 40-44% are Black descendants of slaves who are seen as indigenous to the Muslim American experience. With them in this very diverse community are Americans from South Asian heritage comprising about 30% and just around 20% of Arab heritage. The very make-up of this community is starkly different from European Muslim communities that are primarily organized based on singular ethnic identities (Germany-Turkish, France-Moroccan, UK-Indo/Pakistani etc.) that are directly connected to a “back home” narrative. This inability to build a communal paradigm that is primarily oriented to ‘the West’ inhibits second-generation youth from being able to quickly do so. We are yet to see Belgian Muslim identities that sprout as a norm across the country, rather we are still looking at a Moroccan-French speaking-Brussels identity, or a Turkish-Flemish speaking-Gent identity. Immigrant communities increase their success in integration once they decide that home is here and not back there.

Muslim American youth grow into these communities, thus minimizing the likelihood that ghettos will arise among and within young people in the national Muslim American community. Without this ethnic- or race-based exclusion from others, we see very diverse groupings and friendships among young Muslims that meet each other and develop group identities that maintain their Muslim identity as a central component of what gathers them together.

Secondly, the very constitutional structure of our country yields the ability for diverse communities to fully engage and integrate the broader society. The First Amendment to the Constitution, for instance, contains both a mandate that government ensure the Free Exercise of religion for all persons while simultaneously containing a prohibition on the government establishing any specific religion over others or merely religiosity over the lack thereof. This ensures that America preserves religious pluralism based on the founding principles that have culminated throughout its 200 year history and the continent's 400 years since the first slave landed in Jamestown. Surely, most European countries identify with a specific religion, perhaps even a specific denomination of a religion and European history is dense with religious war as recently as the efforts of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). This creates conflict for the Muslim attempting to integrate. How can one become a British Muslim if a component of being British is to be Christian or to believe in a Judeo-Christian set of values?

Thirdly, Europe has failed at proving that multiculturalism is a winning model for integrating new immigrants and the U.S. has proven that the concept of pluralism is unique and has staying power in building cohesive communities that have ownership over their shared surroundings regardless of background.

Multiculturalism sets up a society in which a dominant group must 'make space' for the most palatable elements of the culture of the recent immigrant while asking her to strip those elements that just don't work in the West. It is a set-up in which each person or group in a society is asked to give up a bit of who they are so that they can be tolerated. Pluralism by contrast is about all segments of society having an opportunity to carve an identity that is 100% identified by the commonly held convictions of the whole while maintaining 100% of what distinguishes each component of that diversity as a means of co-existence.

So in a pluralism that allows young people to create diverse groupings within which there is a collective integration and engagement with the larger society and if such societies have institutions that allow such youth to articulate varying identities, there will be a vastly smaller chance for the radicalization of such youth.

## **Key Recommendations**

The following series of recommendations offer an approach to beginning such a contribution in a way that maximizes the expertise of each section of the public conversation while maintaining the centrality of the expertise of the Muslim American community.

### **Recommendations for Universities**

- Create an institutionally supported Muslim chaplain position for every campus. While every campus has a Hillel support system or a Christian chaplaincy, Muslim students have no comparable support. Hence, MPAC is calling for a collaborative effort emanating from the leadership of every college campus to institute a Muslim religious advisor funded, staffed and certified by the university to ensure the applicability of the chaplain's contributions are germane to each campus.
- Open academic centers on Muslim American religious and civic life that would conduct research, polling and analysis on the integration of Muslim Americans, with a special interest in identity formation and development.

### **Recommendations for Muslim American Institutions**

- Build an institutional culture that is youth-friendly and allows substantive contributions by young people on serious, big-picture challenges facing the community. This goes beyond activities that are traditionally cast as youth-related. For instance, there should be a presence of campus/youth leaders when national leaders meet with senior U.S. government officials. Such engagement must be institutionalized and sustained with a considerable slice of the annual budget and staff dedicated to its success.
- Engage and coordinate horizontally across community institutions nationally, in order to encourage young Muslim Americans to work in collaboration with Muslim and non-Muslim campus and community groups.
- Grow vertically within the community – engage with grassroots Muslim American youth movements such as the Inner-city Muslim Action Network (IMAN) in Chicago or the UMMA Clinic in South Central Los Angeles. This allows national organizations to learn from the successes and mistakes of youth communities across the country that are engaged in arenas largely unknown to national leaders. Currently, national Muslim American organizations function in a vacuum as they continue to neglect most elements of community structures in their decision-making practices.
- Create safe spaces for creative/artistic contributions of Muslim American youth; this will necessarily include funding youth-designed programming for all ages.
- Create liaison officers from Muslim Student Associations to the Muslim communities, institutions and leaders in the vicinity of their universities. MSAs should not function in a vacuum that assumes the campus is a country upon itself; rather campus activism must be contextualized within the realities impacting the Muslim communities across the country. This will also allow student movements to pool from the resources of institutions and leaders that can support the growth of Islamic environments organic to campus life that are harmonious with the surrounding Muslim community.
- Address the experiences of converts into Islam, some of whom are “fished” by those with separatist or extremist ideologies. Similar to the Grassroots Campaign of MPAC which focused on transparency in mosques, a campaign is needed to address

issues that are unique to convert experiences and potential radicalization. A similar campaign or analysis is needed of prison life for Muslims and the potential formation of gangs in prisons throughout the U.S. with radicalized ideologies.

### **Recommendations for Government**

- Create an Inter-Agency Muslim American Youth Advisory Board of leaders and Young Professionals – this group should include young people who are competent on issues such as public diplomacy, counter-extremism and integration.
- Speak out more forcefully against anti-Muslim hate speech. We are not calling for censorship but leadership in exposing bigotry in the name of the war on terrorism and of America.
- Sponsor an Ad Council public service announcement campaign on diversity and tolerance, with the goal of promoting integration of Muslim Americans.
- Hold regional forums around the country that bring together Muslim communities, with a particular focus on youth. The moderator of such events must maintain a focus on issues that are generated by youth and queries of government that allow the participating young people to offer their perspectives to on-going conversations.
- Invite young Muslim American professionals and youth to trans-Atlantic dialogues that aim to create space for Western Muslim Youth to compare their experiences and build friendships and alliances. This will allow active and able young leaders to bring their efforts together and help their communities grow while maintaining these relationships until they grow into becoming future community leaders. This should be conducted as frequently as possible with a broad diversity of participants to ensure rich experiences. At such an event, an opportunity arises for group building experiences as well; experts such as Anthony Robbins, Bill Ury or Stephen Covey to “work” participants towards a successful and productive culmination can conduct these professionally.
- Hire more Muslim American young professionals. One of the cardinals of integration is the high level of education of indigenous and second/third generation youth throughout the country. There are innumerable potential recruits to positions in all areas of government in all three branches allowing them to contribute to a better and more skilled America.
- Move beyond the “Iftar-Heavy Partnership” with the Muslim American community writ large and begin to bolster those members of the various federal agencies that are substantively engaging the community on relevant concerns. Examples of positive engagement that qualify as substantive are the meetings held by the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Rights Division and the regional coordination attempted by the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties of the Department of Homeland Security.
- Eliminate conflation of every criminal activity by Muslims as terrorism. Government public pronouncements about criminal activity throughout the country should not be laced with terrorism terminology that implicates Islam and motivations sourced in Muslim culture and Islamic tradition. Law enforcement officials should also be as loud in informing the public when cases that are championed as terrorism related are

- resolved with no relation to issues related to Islam or the Muslim American community.
- Publicize the relationship with Muslim community leaders to re-assure the American public of the close partnership between the Muslim American community and its government partners.
  - Introduce the Muslim voice into Congressional hearings. Since 9/11, there has been a shamefully low number of Muslim American witnesses before either house of Congress because of the consistent attempts at exclusion by Islamophobes with close Capitol Hill connections. Leaders on Capitol Hill and in the policy making community must get serious about the inclusion of an Muslim American voice to contribute to solutions for so many of the tragic mistakes officials and analysts continue to make.

### **Recommendations for Media**

- Deter bigotry in the media. Producers and hosts that blindly promote the analysis of Islamophobes and their campaigns against the Muslim American community and its leaders are equally guilty in this hate movement. Too many members of the media are negligent in their research, and sugarcoat the racist ideologies of extremists who are self-proclaimed terrorism experts.
- Create more opportunities for a contribution by young Muslim Americans in the media; this should include politics, policy, arts, music, reality TV shows and all other arenas of public conversations to ensure their participation.
- Reach out to diverse representatives of the mainstream of the Muslim American community and stop focusing on the extreme fringes, covering only those who kill in the name of Islam or leave Islam leaving the rest out of the story.
- Hold seminars for anchors and producers to be introduced to authentic approaches to conversations about extremism and violence among Muslims and to better engage an Muslim American perspective. This can be done in conjunction with universities and national Muslim American institutions and well-recognized scholars that have following in youth communities throughout the nation.

### **Conclusion**

We at MPAC see a great need for Muslim Americans institutions, government agencies, elected officials and media organizations to contribute in a much more serious way than in the past to the public conversation regarding how we can ensure that young Americans are not radicalized towards violence and extremist understandings of Islam.

It can be fairly stated that there is a general malaise at the grassroots of the young Muslim movement throughout the country with the national institutions representing the community. Surely, a healthy amount of such a perspective is sourced in youthful distrust of what they perceive to be “establishment politics”, nevertheless it must be addressed directly from the highest levels of Muslim American leadership. National political representation of

the Muslim American community is noticed more for the politics of display (i.e. rallies) rather than substantive advocacy and nuanced representation in decision-making arenas. If young Muslim American youth “lose faith” or continue to distance themselves from the national organizations that claim representation, their ability to fully realize a place at the community and national table for exchange will be limited. Muslim American political and civic institutions must now move beyond the immigrant model into more professional, more institutionalized approaches to governance and performance. There seems to be a complete ignorance at the institutional-class of the community that the talent of young people is the missing link in moving the representation of the community from its place today to a more successful contribution.

The American NGO community must find avenues to fund and coordinate many of the recommendations above. Part of the integration process requires those elements of our pluralism that have a “know-how” needed to create situations in which the above-noted and other goals can be realized. The diversity of knowledge and resources in the NGO community in the U.S. places the Muslim American community at a unique place of potentiality in its attempt to lead Western Muslim communities on issues of integration and the radicalization of Muslim youth.

## **ABOUT MPAC**

The Muslim Public Affairs Council is an American institution which informs and shapes public opinion and policy by serving as a trusted resource to decision makers in government, media and policy institutions. MPAC is also committed to developing leaders with the purpose of enhancing the political and civic participation of Muslim Americans.

MPAC is a public service agency working for the civil rights of Muslim Americans, for the integration of Islam into American pluralism, and for a positive, constructive relationship between Muslim Americans and their representatives.

Since 1988, MPAC has worked diligently to promote a vibrant Muslim American community and enrich American society through exemplifying the Islamic values of Mercy, Justice, Peace, Human Dignity, Freedom, and Equality for all. Over the years, MPAC has built a reputation as a consistent and reliable resource for government and media, and is trusted by Muslim Americans as an authentic, experienced voice.



## **MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

*Los Angeles*

*Washington, DC*

3010 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 603

Los Angeles, CA 90010

tel 213.383.3443 • fax 213.383.9674

tel 202.547.7701 • fax 202.547.7704

[www.mpac.org](http://www.mpac.org) • [info@mpac.org](mailto:info@mpac.org)