



## PERIODS OF THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM IN THE UNITED STATES

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### Article history:

**Received:** 8<sup>th</sup> October 2023  
**Accepted:** 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023  
**Published:** 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### Abstract:

The USA is a country with great cultural phenomena, one of which is considered to be Islamic society. Nevertheless, Islamic community is steadily increasing in America and the number of mosques and Muslim schools, which are becoming most popular among the US population, is increasing fast. This article deals with the beginning of Islamic history, development stages and formation of Muslim community in America. Additionally, the article contains information on the life of American Muslims before and after September 11, 2001, the event that changed the attitude of other nations not only to American Muslims, but also the entire Islamic World as well.

**Keywords:** Islam, Muslims, America, slavery, diversity, mosques, Moorish Science Temple of America, Nation of Islam, organizations, religion, 9/11, Christianity, culture

Amongst the developed countries, the United States is a country that is distinguished by the religious diversity of its population. A survey organized by Pew Research Center in the framework of the Global Attitude Project found that the majority of the U.S. population, like their Latin American neighbors, noted that religion played a 'very significant' role in their lives [1]. However, the United States is the only post-industrial country with a small population that claims atheism.

Today, the United States is one of the few countries in the world that has an incomparable position in the world in the economic and political spheres. In the second half of the twentieth and at the turn of the twenty-first century, the United States has emerged as a major 'cultural hearth' that embodies diverse and different cultures, nations, and beliefs and maintains a balance in their interests, rights, and freedoms. Any other culture that enters the United States falls into the 'cultural hearth' of the nations in that country and adapts there, merging with other cultures and appearing as part of the whole picture of American culture. Of course, in addition to being U.S. citizens, they will also preserve their cultures. The culture itself and cultural values of the peoples or ethnic groups entering the United States are also closely linked to their religion, the most common of which are Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and many other religions.

According The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 62 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christians, 16 percent do not believe in any religion, 2.5 percent believe in religions that are

not yet registered by the state, 1.7 percent are Jewish, 0.7 percent are Buddhist, and 1 percent are Muslim forms [2].

There are different opinions about the penetration of Islam in America, here are some of them:

1) The first Muslim to be mentioned in North American historical chronicles is Estevánico of Azamor. Istaphan, originally from a barbarian tribe in Africa, explored the lands of Arizona and New Mexico, which are now considered U.S. states, as a guide for the Spanish Empire. Istafan came to North America in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century as a slave to the Spanish explorer Alvaro Nunes de Vasa. Nunes de Vasa and Istafan later joined the unsuccessful Narvaes expedition, and in 1527 were captured by the local Indians and enslaved. The Indians make an arduous journey across the Gulf of Mexico to escape captivity. In 1539, he first served as a guide for Spanish explorers in the study of the lands of present-day Southwest America [3,305-314].

2) According to Amadou-Muhtar M'Bow, a famous Senegalese enlightener and former director of UNESCO, the first group of Muslims on board the Moriskos landed in 1587 on the coastal towns of Southern California, and they even reached the western foothills of eastern Tennessee and North Carolina [4,109]. However, the given idea by Senegalese prominent enlightener was not accepted by the general public.

3) According to the American writer and scholar Muhammad Abdullah Ahari, Christopher Columbus's journey to the new continent was based on a story written by Portuguese Muslims who traveled to the



'New World' in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The name of this story is "Ocean of Tears" and its author is al-Idrisi. The story discusses the travels of more than eighty Lisbon explorers during the reigns of the Emir Murabit and Yusuf ibn Tashufin, who visited 14 islands. It is estimated that more than half of those islands are now the Canary Islands and the Azores [5].

Based on these views, we can consider the period of the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as the beginning of a new society as the emergence and development of the first Islamic society in North America:

First, those stories described in al-Idrisi's Ocean of Tears, which served as a factor in the journey of Christopher Columbus, have not found their historical proof;

Secondly, Portuguese Muslims who traveled to the New World in the twelfth century, mentioned in al-Idrisi's Ocean of Tears, did not settle in North America permanently.

American writer and scholar Muhammad Abdullah Ahari divided the stages of development of Islamic society in the United States into five periods:

- a) the period up to 1800;
- b) the period covering 1800-1890;
- c) the period covering 1890-1910;
- g) the period covering 1910-1950;
- d) The period after 1950.

We can divide the stages of development of the Islamic society into three main periods to cover the most important events in the Islamic society of the USA: the Islamic society in the USA in the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period after September 11, 2001.

### **MUSLIM SOCIETY IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SIXTEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES**

This period is mainly explained by the influx of the first Muslims in North America, especially the United States, the emergence of Islamic families among the Muslim population, the formation of Muslims as a society, and the stages of development.

While some experts point out that the majority of African Muslims were brought to North America as slaves, others say that African slaves rarely know some of the rules of Islam. The influx of slaves into North America began in the 1920s and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the number of slaves brought to the new world had exceeded 500,000. More than half of the slaves cited came from areas where a small portion of the population believed in Islam, and no less than 200,000 slaves came from areas where Islam had a high status in society. Most of those slaves were

brought from the Senegalese regions where the Islamic community was formed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. According to some sources, the enslaved population of other religions who came to North America became acquainted with the teachings of Islam from Muslim slaves and active Muslim traders, and some converted to this religion [6,682].

As noted above, the influx of Muslims into North America, particularly the United States, dates back to the mid-sixteenth century, and the fact that Estevánico of Azamor came as the first Muslim in historical chronicles has found its historical proof. In addition to Estevánico of Azamor, the following individuals are mentioned in historical sources as the first Muslims in North America:

An Arab immigrant named Nasruddiyn was executed for refusing to marry the queen of the Indian Mohawk tribe [7].

Ayub Sulaiman ibn Diallo, who was enslaved in Maryland for two years in the 1730s, and who knew Arabic to the extent that he could translate the inscriptions on coins for the British Museum, could write the names of places in West Africa.

Salim, an Algerian, was educated in Istanbul as a member of an Algerian Muslim aristocratic family. Upon his return from Istanbul, he was abducted by the Spaniard slave traders and sold into slavery to the French in New Orleans. Eventually he escaped from slavery and began living among the American Indian tribes in Virginia. He was later found again and taught English, and because of his knowledge of Greek, he was given the New Testament in Greek. During this period, several members of the US Congress became friendly and close to him, and Salim converted to Christianity under the influence of 'new friends'. After converting to Christianity, he decides to return to his homeland to preach the Bible, but his journey to his homeland became disastrous and he was expelled from his homeland as an apostate. Returning to America, he meets Thomas Jefferson and attends the first Continental Congress, where he dies as a mentally ill man who had renounced his family, his religion, for America. Some say he renounced Christianity and died as a refugee, while others say he died as a conventional Christian person [8].

It should be noted that only Ayyub Sulaiman ibn Diallo, one of the above-mentioned historical figures, died while trying to spread and propagate this religion and defending his faith.

In 1790, an important event in the life of U.S. Muslims took place, according to which a group of Moroccan Muslims in South Carolina was granted special legal status, and twelve years after that historic event, the



Moroccan sultan became the first head of state to recognize U.S. independence. In 1796, U.S. President John W. Adams signed an agreement stating that the United States has no hostility to the traditions, religion, values and freedoms of the Muslim population.

It is noteworthy that Robert Madden's 'A Twelvemonth's Residence in the West Indies, during the transition from slavery to apprenticeship; with incidental notice of the state of society, prospects, and natural resources of Jamaica and other islands' [9] is not only about the Muslim population in North America being fluent in Arabic, but also about the existence of several secret Arab and Islamic schools on different Caribbean islands and slave huts in Brazil.

According to Muhammad Abdullah Ahari, two articles by Theodore Dwight on the existence of Islamic circles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, James Cooper's account of Salih Bilali (Solix Fulani in other sources), and William Brown Hodgson's documents confirming the writing and transmission of the first Islamic rules in the New World noted [10].

Among the American British, the first well-known convert to Islam was Alexander Russell Webb, who converted to Islam in 1888 and in 1893 became the sole representative of Islam in the first World Religions Parliament.

### **MUSLIM SOCIETY IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

In the early twentieth century, the most prominent Muslim figure in North America, including the United States, was Alexander Russell Webb, a prominent figure who first converted to Islam among the native Americans. He was an editor at one of the local newspapers before converting to Islam, and later served as U.S. consul in the Philippines from 1887 onwards. He later studied the religions of the peoples of the East and converted to Islam under the influence of Indian Muslims. In 1892, Alexander Russell Webb resigned from the consulate and went to India, where he gave lectures on Islam, the Way of Preference, and Islamic philosophy in four cities of the country. Then go back to America.

He founded the Eastern Publishing House, which publishes a number of books on Islamic culture in America. It had a mosque on Broadway in New York, which was demolished before his death in 1915, but according to Abdulsattar Ghazali's personal website, the first mosque in the United States was built in 1915 by Albanian Muslims in Biddeford, Maine, where a Muslim cemetery has survived [11]. The construction of mosques increased significantly in the 1920s and 1930s, and in 1952 there were more than 20 mosques

in the United States, according to Amadou-Muhtar M'Bou's Islam and Muslims in North America [4].

By the middle of the twentieth century, there were several Islamic groups in the United States. The most prominent of these are traditional Sufi, Ahmadiyya, and a number of smaller organizations of Afro-American Muslims whose leaders include Sheikh David, Sufi Abdul Hamid, Nobel Drew Ali (real name Timothy Drew), Elijah Muhammad, and several other leaders. Nobel Drew Ali founded the Moorish Science Temple of America in 1913 and began writing various 'sacred' texts based on his narrow and shallow Islamic knowledge, which promoted African-American nationalism among Muslims.

Among the organizations mentioned above, the 'Nation of Islam' (NOI) is significantly different from the others. The Nation of Islam was founded in 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad, inspired by Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple of America, whose main goal was to ensure and protect the rights and freedoms of Afro-American Muslims. It was later revealed that Fard had instilled nationalist and separatist ideas in the members of the organization. In 1934, Elijah Muhammad became the leader of the Nation of Islam and consecrated Wallace Fard Muhammad. The consecration of Wallace Fard Muhammad was later accepted by the public as a deification. Sadly, Fard was later declared a 'prophet' in defiance of the Sharia.

In 1975, the Nation of Islam was declared a traditional Sunni organization by Warith Deen Muhammad. Subsequently, Silis Muhammad developed the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and later, Luis Farrakhan revived Fard's theoretical views. At present, the influence of this organization on African-American society is significantly great.

One of the main organizations after the Nation of Islam is the American Society of Muslims (ASM), better known as African-American association of Muslims, which is a follower of the Nation of Islam. Members of the American Society of Muslims accepted Warith Deen Muhammad as their leader. The group has largely promoted the Nation of Islam as a separatist group. While it is not known how many Americans were attracted to the American Muslim community, most of the organization's supporters were African Americans. Another major Islamic organization is considered to be the Islamic Society of North America. The Society is an association of immigrant Muslim organizations and the main organization of representatives of Islam in North America. According to the organization's official website, '... the community is predominantly consists of immigrants, with more members than members of



the American Muslim Community.' Most mosques in the United States are accepted by the Islamic Society of North America as its affiliates. The annual meeting of the Society is the largest gathering of Muslims in the United States [12].

In addition to the organizations mentioned above, there are a number of other large organizations that also serve to protect the interests, rights and freedoms of a particular segment of society.

#### **THE PERIOD AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001**

After the events of September 11, 2001, significant changes took place in the lives of Muslims in the Islamic world, as well as in the United States. According to Tolerance.org, '... after the events of September 11, 2001, a number of Muslims living in the United States were periodically harassed and attacked by members of other populations.' [13]

After the September events, many Americans realized how many Muslims there were among them, and at that time there was a growing interest among non-Muslims in gaining an understanding of Islam and its essence. Among the people of the United States, selling Islamic books has become the most lucrative business. In the following weeks, the Quran was listed as the best-selling book in American bookstores.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attack, the U.S. president spoke out and asked the people not to attack and oppress Muslims because of the prejudice of Americans against the Muslim population. However, pressure and attacks were already taking place.

The pressure from the Americans was two-sided. On the one hand, their attitude was directed at the Arabs, on the other hand, there were attacks on Muslims or ethnic groups similar to Muslims, in neighborhoods inhabited by Muslims on a regular basis for a certain period of time. As an example of this, in 2006 a woman (wearing a headscarf) who was taking her child to school in California was shot dead by unknown individuals, Muslim leaders in the United States say the incident was religious in nature [13]. Russia's Izvestia newspaper reported on September 1, 2002, that despite statements by American and several Western European politicians that Islam and terrorism were incompatible, '... a number of Christian people began slandering Islam after 9/11.' Priest Franklin Graham, who called Islam, one of the world's largest and most ancient religions, a 'religion of immorality', has become an evil and disgusting figure for millions of American Muslims, and he has been hated by the Muslim population [14].

It is important to note that the attack on Islam and Muslims has only increased interest in Islam among the non-Muslim population of the United States. As

mentioned above, at that time the demand for Islamic books, especially the Holy Qur'an, increased dramatically, and the sale of Islamic books became one of the most profitable businesses. This process went on decades, the number of visitors to American Islamic sites is increased day by day, and the number of converts to Islam among the population is also escalated.

As the number of converts to Islam increases, it is not clear how many Muslims currently live in the United States. The number of Muslims living in America has varied in different sources and it has been constantly changing. For example, if a source says around 3 million, the number of Muslims will reach about 15 million, according to the American Supreme Islamic Council. According to David Barrett, a leading expert on religious statistics in the United States, the number of Muslims in the United States exceeded 10,000 in 1900, and by 1970 it had risen to 800,000 (200,000 African Americans), and in 2000 to 4.1 million (200,000 African Americans). . The largest survey conducted in 1990 by New York University scientists Barry Cosmin and Seymour Lachman found that Muslims made up 0.03 percent of the U.S. population [15].

It is also clear from the above old data that the Islamic society in America is a rapidly growing segment of the population. The following factors can contribute to the rapid development of Islam in this country:

- 1) The influx of large numbers of Muslim immigrants into the United States;
- 2) Peoples who have always believed in Islam are eager to have many children as possible, and the number of children in each family is higher than in non-Muslim families;
- 3) The sharp increase in the interest of the majority of the American population in the study of Islam after 9/11.

It should be noted that the influx of Muslim immigrants has slightly decreased after the 9/11 attacks, but the number of Muslims has not stopped due to the intensification of the process of checking the documents required for entry and the residence in the United States.

The above-mentioned circumstances did not leave the US government officials indifferent either. Alex Aleksiev, a Pentagon and CIA national security adviser and a senior fellow at the Center for Political Security, said in a speech at a seminar in Moscow in 2003 that he was concerned about the conversion of the U.S. military to Islam, which negatively affected U.S. foreign policy and military capabilities, because more than three thousand American soldiers converted to





Islam during the wars in the Persian Gulf. As a way out of the situation, Aleksiev said that active measures should be taken against the wide spread of Islam [16]. The fact that the majority of Muslims living in America are completely opposed to vices such as international terrorism and religious extremism is reflected in surveys conducted by various organizations. As an example, according to a survey by the U.S. Pew Research Center, 53 percent of American Muslims say their lifestyles have become significantly more difficult since the 'September events'. When asked to cite the reasons for the above attitudes, more than ten percent of them answered such as racial discrimination (19%), terrorism (15%), society's lack of understanding of Islam (13%), and lifestyle (12%). 76% of respondents said they were worried about the spread of Islamic extremism around the world and 61% in the United States [17,35]. Surveys show that a large proportion of American Muslims have no propensity for terrorism or religious extremism, and many of them have also stressed how serious a sin it is to kill innocent people in Islam.

In conclusion, it should be noted that religious diversity is very rare in the countries of the world, as in the United States. The idea that the buds of Islam in North America were started by Portuguese Muslims who traveled in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but that they did not settle in North America, found historical evidence that the advent of Islam in America coincided with the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The African Muslim population, which enslaved in the New World, played a major role in the spread of Islam in America. Among today's African Americans, more than half of the indigenous population who believe in Islam are their descendants. The number of Muslims in the U.S. is growing steadily, and U.S. sociologists believed that after 2010, Muslims would become the largest religion in the U.S. with the largest number of believers after Christians.

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