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Private Kahn and Brother Webb: Islam in the Late 19th-Century United States

An Honors Thesis Presented by

Katherine Farr ('21)

Connecticut College

New London, CT

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Many have said that it takes a village to raise a child, but after spending a year writing this honors thesis and far longer than that performing research for it, I can safely say that it takes a village of sorts to write a thesis, too. Therefore, I think it is only fitting then that I thank my “village,” before I finish writing it.

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Introduction

Islam in the US before the Civil War

My name is Omar Ibn Said, son of Seid. My birthplace was Fut Tur (Fouta Toro) between the two rivers...there came to our place a large army, who killed many men and took me, and brought me to the great sea, and sold me into the hands of Christians, who bound me and sent me onboard a great ship and we sailed the great sea a month and a half, when we came to a place called Charleston in the Christian language.

-Excerpt from the *Life of Omar Ibn Said*, written ca. 1860-1864

In 1830 an escaped enslaved man, called “Morro” by his master, was captured by a group of slave catchers in Fayetteville, North Carolina.¹ He was arrested, and imprisoned for sixteen days, where he occupied himself by writing in Arabic on the walls of his jail cell.² He might have been imprisoned for longer than this had a visitor not asked him “your name is Omar, is it not Said?”³ This exchange eventually resulted in “Morro,” whose real name was Omar Ibn Said, being sold to Jim Owen, brother of Governor John Owen. He was an enslaved man in Jim Owen’s household for the rest of his life. There, he wrote his autobiography sometime between 1828 and 1830, and was encouraged to convert to Christianity. This autobiography, now titled *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said*, is still the only known US slave narrative written in Arabic.⁴ Thanks to the Library of Congress’s recently created Omar Ibn Said collection, and recent translations of his autobiography and other works, he is probably the most famous enslaved Muslim in US history, but he was far from the first, and he is unlikely to have been the last.

The story of Islam in the United States from the US’s inception through the Antebellum period is often understood as a story of enslaved people arriving in the United States, bringing

1. Omar Ibn Said. *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. 65

2. “Omar Ibn Said Collection” *The Library of Congress*. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/omar-ibn-said-collection/about-this-collection/#text1>

3 Said, Omar Ibn, 65

4. “Omar Ibn Said Collection”

their faith with them, and attempting to preserve it. Despite their best efforts, Islam as it was practiced by enslaved people is not believed to have persisted among second-generation African Americans, though many cultural practices among enslaved people, and as a consequence, free people of color, have Islamic influences.⁵ International slave trading was officially banned in the United States in 1808. Although illegal slave trading continued until 1860 at least, far fewer first-generation enslaved people arrived in the mid-19th century. The lack of religious transmission, preservation and dwindling numbers meant far fewer enslaved Muslims lived in the United States by the mid-19th century. By the late 19th century, most of them were probably dead. Likewise, the large wave of immigration of immigration from majority Muslim nations and the rise of Islamic movements such as Nation of Islam did not begin until the 20th century. As a result, the period from the start of the Civil War in 1860 to the beginning of the 20th century could be viewed as a gap in the story of Islam in the United States. However, this is a misperception, and this thesis will attempt to correct it.

In truth, Islam continued to be practiced and to evolve in the post-Emancipation United States. It was no longer practiced only by enslaved people, but embraced by free Black people, immigrants, and a cohort of white converts mostly concentrated in US cities in the late 1890s. Though there were fewer Muslims in the mid to late 19th-century United States, the face and demographics of Islam in the United States started to change. As Islam in the United States changed in practice, so too did non-Muslim Americans' understandings of Islam. Contributing to their perspectives on Islam were Christian missionaries, whose work in majority Muslim countries and the inflammatory articles they wrote and sent home also helped to shape

5. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri. *A History of Islam in America*. (New York: Cambridge University Press) 2010. 92-93

Americans' perspective on the religion. At the same time, the end of the Civil War allowed Americans to imagine a world beyond their borders again, and those who could afford it chose to travel to the perceived "Holy Lands" of the Middle East and Northern Africa. As a result, travel journals such as Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* (1878) became popular novels, and some Americans attempted to learn about and even convert to Islam as a result of this expanded global perspective. One such convert's efforts led to the establishment of the United States' first Muslim publishing company and mission which, although minimally successful and short lived, is significant in the ideological shift its presence in the United States signifies.

This thesis will attempt to explore all of these aspects of Islam in the post-Civil War United States, from 1865 until 1900. I choose this time period because the Union victory in the American Civil War resulted in a strengthening of American presence abroad through increased diplomatic relations and greater numbers of American tourists. With the turmoil of the Civil War brought to a close, more Americans travelled abroad and established international ties and relations. With this came an increase in immigration (and laws restricting immigration) from Europe and Asia, including Muslims immigrants. The increased travel also led to an increase in international ideas, which led to the spread of Islam as a religion rather than an abstract concept. Chapter one will explore Americans' popular perceptions of Islam, and how it was affected by diplomatic relations, the American press, and world events. This would have set a baseline for how Muslims living in the United States would have been perceived.

Chapter two documents the life and impact of Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, an American convert to Islam, who established the first Muslim mission and periodical in the United States, to mixed reviews by the public, as well as a few rival Muslim missions who emerged during this time period. This section argues that, despite the negative press surrounding

the Mission, it was the product of the Third Great Awakening, and might have succeeded had it not been stymied by poor funding and internal quarreling.

Finally, chapter three will examine the lives of everyday Muslims and people of Muslim heritage living in the United States. During this time period, most of them were immigrants or the descendants of enslaved people, and their lives will require more speculation as they are not extensively documented. This thesis documents how American Islam began to change from a religion generally practiced by a small group of enslaved and formerly enslaved people, to one practiced by a wide variety of people from a variety of different backgrounds. This would only continue in the 20th-century.

Early Diplomacy with “the Muslim World”

As history does not occur in a vacuum and this history is not necessarily common knowledge; therefore, it seems wise to summarize the United States’ diplomatic relationships with what its citizens referred to as either the “Orient” or, as some do today, “the Muslim World.”⁶ This included countries with significant Muslim populations in Northern Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

These early relations were complex and varied. Historian Michael B. Oren explains that the United States has been diplomatically involved with “the Muslim world” from its inception. In 1776, the greatest threat to the newly dubbed United States of America’s sovereignty next to

⁶ This framework is rather problematic as it suggests that everyone who lives in this part of the world is Muslim, that Muslims only live in this part of the world, ignoring the fact that Islam is a universal religion, not an ethnic one, and there were and are plenty of Muslims living outside of the “Muslim World.” It could also suggest that all actions taken by these countries are the result of Islam. Though it is a problematic framework, I use it here anyway as it accurately represents how Americans understood Islam at this time.

British forces was bankruptcy, and complete insolvency was a real concern post-independence.⁷ To avoid this, the United States continued to trade around the world, but without the protection of the British fleet, US ships destined for the Mediterranean were in danger of being attacked by “corsairs,” or “pirates,” from Morocco, Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers, an area Westerners called “Barbary.”⁸ Ships taken over by these “Barbary pirates” would have their cargo impounded and their crews and passengers sold into slavery unless their families paid a heavy ransom or they converted to Islam. This would allow them to serve their captors in professional positions or as pirates.⁹ By the end of the American Revolution, combined attacks by the British fleet and the Barbary pirates had left the United States almost entirely without a navy so they were unable to militarily defend themselves from attacks.¹⁰ The British Empire and other European powers had dealt with the Barbary pirates by paying them a yearly tribute,¹¹ but the United States refused to pay a similar bribe due to pride and post-war financial troubles. Consequently, their ships were easy targets.

The United States attempted to solve the problem through diplomatic means. These included the 1779 Treaty of Amity and Commerce with France, which included a provision that US ally France would use its diplomatic powers to protect American commerce from the pirates,¹² and a series of negotiations from 1785-1786 between Connecticut sea Captain John Lamb and Dey of Algiers, Hassan Bashaw. The government had hoped that Lamb would be able

7. Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007). 17.

8. Ibid, 18

9 Ibid, 19

10. Ibid, 23

11. Ibid, 25

12. "Treaty of Amity and Commerce." *Connecticut Gazette* (New London, Connecticut) XVI, no. 791, January 8, 1779

to negotiate the freedom of US hostages, but the Dey sent Lamb a list of demands that Congress was either unwilling or unable to comply with, and Lamb eventually gave up, telling then-Minister Plenipotentiary for Negotiating Treaties of Amity and Commerce and future President Thomas Jefferson that “it is my duty to advise to abandon the undertaking, as it will be entirely in vain to persevere.”¹³ This outcome dismayed Jefferson and outraged the American public, with the press lamenting the Constitution’s “impotence in external force” when it came to dealing with the pirates.¹⁴ The US government did eventually sign a treaty with Algiers in 1796 in order to have their hostages released, but they were not able to fulfil the conditions of the treaty for several years.¹⁵ The US was, however, successful in negotiating and ratifying a treaty with Morocco in 1768, where both parties agreed not to attack the other’s ships and regard each other as “most favored nations” in terms of trade.¹⁶ Congress finally agreed to raise a navy in 1793,¹⁷ and the conflict culminated in the first Barbary Pirate War from 1802-1805. The United States’ eventual victory in this war increased their influence and prestige in Europe and allowed trade with the Mediterranean, and Muslim states such as the Ottoman Empire to flourish and expand into Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East.¹⁸

As the Barbary Pirates were Muslim, the First Barbary War (1802-1805), Second Barbary War (1815) and the Barbary captivity narratives that emerged from them influenced US

13. “John Lamb to Thomas Jefferson, March 29, 1786” in *The Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress*. Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/resource/mtj1.013_0310_0310/

14. “Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings.” *New-Hampshire Mercury and General Advertiser* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire) II, no. LXXIII, May 10, 1786: [2]

15 “Treaty of Peace and Amity Signed with Algiers, Signed at Algiers” Digitized by The Avalon Project, Yale University. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1795t.asp Accessed 11 April 2021.

16 “Treaty with Morocco, June 28 and July 15 1768.” Digitized by the Avalon Project, Yale University. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1786t.asp Accessed 11 April 2021.

17. Oren, 34

18. Oren, 78

perceptions of Islam for many years. Such narratives often framed Islam as the reason for their conflict, resulting in much of the US demonizing not just the pirates, but Muslims as a general rule.¹⁹ However, this was not a universal portrayal, and other authors wrote with a more nuanced perspective. Such authors often used slavery in Algeria or Morocco as a means of critiquing slavery in the US.²⁰ This understanding carried into the 19th century, though changes in diplomatic relations, conflicts in the region, and US and British tourism to the region would drastically alter it.

In addition to this historical memory, the first US-based Christian Missionary movements to the Middle East and Northern Africa began in 1819 and continued to grow well into the 20th century.²¹ As Christine Leigh Heyrman explains in *American Apostles: When Evangelicals Entered the World of Islam*, many of these Christian missionaries were driven by the belief that the Biblical end of the world was fast approaching, and that all those who died without accepting the Christian faith would suffer eternal damnation.²² They furthermore believed that they were greatly outnumbered by these “unbelievers,” especially Muslims, and lamented that millions of people died unsaved per day, believing that only Christian evangelism could save them; Christian missionaries would therefore be “martyrs and apostles” of the faith.²³ Christian missionaries frequently posited that “military conquest and forced conversions” were the sole reasons for Islam’s spread; this perspective which has its roots in the Middle Ages, but had persisted into the 19th century.²⁴ Although the broader US press offered more diverse

19. Christine Leigh Heyrman, *American Apostles: When Evangelicals Entered The World of Islam*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015) 66

20. Ibid, 67

21. Oren, 147

22. Heyrman, 27

23. Ibid, 35

24. Ibid, 36

perspectives of Islam, they still sensationalized it,²⁵ and the missionaries had an excise influence on Americans' understanding of Islam simply because of how much material they produced and how often they interacted with Muslims. The missionaries' influence remained during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era, but competed with tourists' opinions of Islam, which varied greatly.

Islam and American Slavery

Even as white Christians in the US expressed horror and disgust at their fellow whites being enslaved by the Barbary Pirates, the Atlantic and domestic slave trades continued. The history of Islam as it relates to slavery in the Americas is well documented by historians such as Sylviane Diouf in *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (1998), Michael Gomez in *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identity in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, (1997) and Kambiz GhaneaBassiri in his book *A History of Islam in America* (2010). It is widely acknowledged that the first Muslims in the United States were enslaved West African Muslims, and, thanks to the excellent work of the historians noted above and many others, their impact on slave culture and indeed African American culture is better understood.

As Diouf explains, enslaved Muslims in the United States were outnumbered by Christians, animists, and followers of other religions for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, the sale of fellow free Muslims was prohibited, but exceptions were often made for criminals and especially prisoners of war, who were accused of heresy, apostasy, or not properly following religious practices.²⁶ Most people captured under these circumstances were sold in the Arab

25. Ibid, 53

26. Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved In the Americas*. New York: New York University Press, 1998. 12

slave trade, but a significant number were sold to European and American slave traders as well, some of them bound for the United States. Estimates about how many enslaved Muslims were sold in the United States vary substantially. Some estimates place the number as high as 10-20% of enslaved people sold,²⁷ although as Gomez notes, the data on the subject is almost entirely qualitative, so it is difficult to come up with a quantitative estimate.²⁸ Regardless, there were enough of them that they left an impression on slaveholders, evidence of their lives exist in the historical record (even though enslaved people are so often left out of the historical record due to their position), and their cultural and religious practices impacted African American and slave culture in the United States.

Omar Ibn Said was one example of a Muslim enslaved in the US, but there are other famous cases as well. One example is Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, called “Job Ben Solomon” in the Maryland colony where he was enslaved. Judge Thomas Bluett (1690-1749) wrote *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon the High Priest of Boonda in Africa Who was a Slave About Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, Was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734* recounting his time with Diallo. As the title suggests, Diallo was of noble birth and from Senegambia. Diallo and a few of his associates were captured, made to look like prisoners of war, sold to a “Captain Pike,” and sent to Annapolis, Maryland with other enslaved people.²⁹ Like Omar Ibn Said a hundred years later, his story was

27. Craig Considine, *Muslims in America, Examining the Facts*. (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO) 2018. 1

28. Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identity in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). 59

29. James Bluett, *Some memoirs of the life of Job, the son of Solomon the high priest of Boonda in Africa; who was a slave about two years in Maryland; and afterwards being brought to England, was set free, and sent to his native land in the year 1734*. By Thomas Bluett, Gent. who

only discovered when he ran from his enslavement and was captured. He was eventually sent back to Senegambia after Maryland's British Governor James Oglethorpe agreed to pay his bond and pay to have him sent first to England and then home to Senegambia.³⁰ Bluett made frequent comments about Diallo's religious observance, such as his refusal to drink wine or eat pork. Another famous case is that of Yarrow Mamout, a Muslim, Fulani man who was freed from enslavement in 1796 after 40 years of slavery in Maryland. He also managed to earn enough money to buy a house in Georgetown, Washington D.C. and his son Aquilla's freedom shortly afterwards.³¹ Both men are famous in part because, unlike most enslaved people (Muslims included), their portraits were painted.

There are also more scattered examples suggesting the Muslim heritage of many enslaved people such as Quranic names in runaway slave advertisements. Gomez notes that "names like Bullaly (Bilali), Mustapha, Sambo, Bocarrey (Bukhari, or possibly Bubacar from Abu Bakr), and Mamado (Mamadu) are regularly observed in the advertisements for runaway slaves."³² Many African Muslims were literate, attempted to preserve their literacy, and some even owned Arabic Qurans provided by people who were sympathetic to their plight.³³ It is unclear how long the type of Islam practiced by enslaved persons persisted. Sylvaine Diouf concludes that it "did not outlive the last slave" or "survive in its orthodox form,"³⁴ as distance from their homelands, external pressures, and a lack of access to faith traditions made it difficult to continue practicing

was intimately acquainted with him in America, and came over to England with him. (London: Richard Ford) 1734. 18

30. Ibid, 23

31. James H Johnson, *From Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012). 4

32. Gomez, 68

33. Diouf, 113

34. Diouf, 3

their religions. As a result of this, the 19th-century, postbellum United States could be looked at as a gap in the story of Islam in the United States, but this is not the case. In some ways, this thesis continues the work of Diouf, Gomez, and GhaneaBassiri by charting Islam in the United States after most of the people they discussed (though not all) had passed away.

Before beginning this thesis, I should acknowledge my position as an outsider to the topics being discussed. Although many of the people discussed in this thesis were of Middle Eastern, South Asian, or Black African descent and/or were Muslim, I am a white-passing US citizen of a mixed-European and Caribbean heritage, and do not consider myself particularly religious. I have very little intrinsic connection to the topics at hand, but I write this thesis with all respect as I believe it is a story that deserves to be told. I humbly wish to add to this already established history with my thesis.

Chapter One

The “Hateful Turk” and the “Wondrous East:” Dueling Perceptions of Islam in the 19th-century US

The crescent is waning. The Star of Bethlehem has turned into the ‘Sun of Righteousness,’ and its life-giving beams are penetrating the dark places of the earth. Let the Church take courage. ‘The morning cometh,’ yea, thank God, has come. The day of Christ’s triumph hastens on. Let the church *give, work, and pray*. ‘Thy kingdom come.’

– “A Musselman[sic] and a Christian in Debate,” in *Zion’s Herald*, 1872

Citizens of the mid-19th-century United States generally maintained a complicated if not always antagonistic relationship with Islam. This is readily apparent in writings from the time period as well as the lives of some Muslims living in the Postbellum United States. Depending on the publication and the authors’ goals, dueling perceptions portrayed “the Orient” as something wondrous, if not necessarily good, while Muslims themselves were a people to be feared or pitied, but very rarely respected. This chapter explores the potential causes of these contradictory perceptions as well as their implications and consequences for American Muslims judging by the ways Islam was portrayed in the US media.

Many of these potential causes reach back to the end of the American Civil War. By the mid-19th century, the United States had cultivated, or was attempting to cultivate, diplomatic relations with powers all over the world, including the Ottoman Empire and other majority Muslim powers like Persia. The beginnings and the conclusion of the American Civil War complicated diplomatic relations with most US allies, and those in the Muslim World were no exception to this rule. As some European powers, such as France, attempted to take advantage of the Civil War to expand their trade or territory while the Union was occupied, US relations with its perceived Muslim allies remained relatively stable, although a few diplomatic incidents during or after the war caused these relationships to become strained.

The Civil War had not entirely stopped the Christian missionary movements of the early 19th century, and missionaries continued to work in the Middle East and northern Africa

throughout the Civil War. As a result, Christian missionaries had an outsized influence on public opinion. Even though their tactics evolved, their rhetoric did not, nor did such efforts appear to be particularly successful at attracting converts, especially among Muslims. Perhaps it is no surprise then that, with exceptions, Christian missionaries presented the most universally negative view of Islam possible. To the missionaries, they were not just a group of odd people to be pitied for their strange behaviors, as many secular publications portrayed them; they were a threat to their “good work.” Even though Christian missionaries made up a relatively small part of the population of the United States, they had an outsized influence on the government and the general public’s opinion simply because of how often they wrote about and interacted with Muslims. The second section of this chapter examines the Christian press, and how publications produced by missionaries fueled negative perceptions of Islam. It will also determine why their opinions were so negative and the extenuating circumstances behind such opinions.

At the same time, the end of the American Civil War meant greater stability in the United States, and more Americans began travelling to the Middle East and the “holy lands” not just as Christian missionaries, but also as tourists. Prior to the Civil War, US citizens typically viewed travelling to the Middle East as a tourist as reckless and foolish,³⁵ but after the Civil War respected figures such as Mark Twain made the journey. Some wrote about their travels, informing their countrymen without the opportunity to travel about the wonders they viewed or, in Twain’s case, the manufactured absurdity. Travel for adventure rather than spreading the gospel brought another dimension to the perception of Islam in the United States. 19th-century Press coverage describing Islam was varied but, for the most part, remained negative and informed by stereotypes about specific groups of people rather than the religion as a whole.

35. Oren, 228

Many of these articles, and in some cases novels, were travel journal style articles written to entertain. Sometimes, Muslims and indeed all citizens of these countries were treated as little more than pieces of scenery. In these articles, Muslims' presence was meant to conjure an image and reinforce the difference of the country being discussed. Other articles spoke of Islam directly. These might comment on the "peculiar" customs of the people there or impose judgements of them through the lens of European superiority. Perhaps a little surprisingly, some articles spoke positively of Islam. The last section of this chapter examines secular publications, such as Mark Twain's memoir *The Innocents Abroad*, and how this perspective may have shaped Americans' understanding of the Middle East and, by extension, Islam.

Diplomatic Efforts

Following the Civil War, the United States attempted to strengthen and, in some cases, expand diplomatic relations with foreign powers. Majority Muslim countries were no exception to this rule. Though the more intricate machinations of diplomacy, such as the signings of treaties and trade agreements, may not have affected the average US view of Islam very much, the results of these diplomatic maneuvers sometimes did.

Of the majority-Muslim allies the United States had at the start of the Civil War, it enjoyed the friendliest relations with the Ottoman Empire, although this changed over the course of the 19th century due to missionary efforts and reports of violence against Armenians. Unlike most other foreign powers, which had remained officially neutral during the American Civil War, the Ottoman Empire officially supported the Union. In 1862, the Sultan issued a decree prohibiting Confederate vessels from entering Ottoman waters "for the purpose of preying on

American commerce,”³⁶ much to the delight of the US press, who praised the Sultan for his “friendliness towards the United States.” Michael Oren suggests that Sultan Abdul ‘Aziz supported the Union because the Ottoman Empire had battled secessionist movements in Greece and the Balkans, therefore, the Sultan sympathized with the Union.³⁷ The policies of Sultan Abdul Hamid II would later strain US relations with the Ottoman Empire. These policies eventually led to the Hamidian and Assyrian Genocides, as well as many other acts of ethnic violence against Ottoman Christians. As will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter, condemnation from the United States and European powers was swift and severe, thanks in part to the use of the telegraph. During the Civil War, though, relations were stable.

Although the US Civil War did not damage the US relationship with the most powerful of its Muslim allies, the Ottoman Empire, its relations with Egypt became strained over Egyptian troops in Mexico. Egypt commercially benefitted from the American Civil War as Europe turned to the Egyptian cotton market as an alternate source to the fractured American market, but this does not appear to have damaged its relations with the Union.³⁸ The damage came when France invaded and seized control of Mexico, establishing it as a French client state. This is referred to as the Second French Intervention in Mexico or the French Expedition to Mexico (1862-1867)³⁹. Though the US government was nervous about having foreign troops so near their border, especially with the Monroe Doctrine still in force,⁴⁰ it did not have the money or the forces to

36. "The Sultan's Order excluding Rebel Privateers from His Ports." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), June 16, 1862: 4.

37. Oren, 183

38. Earle, Edward Meade. "Egyptian Cotton and the American Civil War." *Political Science Quarterly*, Dec. 1926. 524

39. "French Intervention in Mexico and the American Civil War." *United States Department of State, Office of the Historian*. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1861-1865/french-intervention>

40. Refers to President James Monroe's December 1823 address to Congress. Most importantly in this case, this policy established that if a foreign power attempted to establish colonies in the

intervene during the Civil War. Furthermore, the government did not want to risk a military conflict with France. As a result, the US government did not intervene beyond expressing their displeasure in writing.⁴¹ This incident strained foreign relations with the French and Egypt too, as the Egyptian sovereign provided the French with 477 troops.⁴² These soldiers were Black, and almost invariably described in US accounts as “the Egyptian battalion of negroes,” or “Napoleon’s negroes.” Apparently, French soldiers in Mexico had a high mortality rate. Napoleon III believed that Black troops would have a lower one, as, at the time, many white people believed that Black people were resistant to yellow fever, a common ailment among the soldiers.⁴³ There is little discussion of Islam in American accounts of this battalion; instead, the emphasis was on the soldiers’ race. At least one newspaper published a story claiming that the Egyptian soldiers had been conscripted against their will, and called the proceeding “a revival of the slave trade,⁴⁴” but this story is unverified. Although it certainly fostered ill will towards Egypt, or at least the Egyptian government, it does not appear to have affected opinions of Islam directly. At the close of the Civil War, the United States had more power to intervene in Mexico and with the Egyptian battalion. The US consul to Egypt threatened the Egyptian sovereign,

Western Hemisphere, it would be viewed as an act of aggression against the United States. “The Monroe Doctrine.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 5 November 2020.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Monroe-Doctrine>

41. “French Intervention in Mexico and the American Civil War.” United States Department of State, Office of the Historian. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1861-1865/french-intervention>

42. United States, Congress, House. "Message of the President of the United States and accompanying documents, to the two Houses of Congress at the commencement of the second session of the Fortieth Congress. Part II." 40th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Exec.Doc. 1, 1868.

43. "The War in Mexico. Vast Importance of Napoleon's [sic] Plans." *New York Herald* (New York, New York) XXVIII, no. 40, February 10, 1863: [1]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

44. "Napoleon's Negroes For Mexico." *Springfield Republican* (Springfield, Massachusetts), March 21, 1863: 2.

Sa'id Pascha, pointing out that the United States also had Black troops at their disposal. The consul believed they were better suited to the Egyptian climate, just as Napoleon III believed Black troops were better suited to the Mexican climate, and they could be used to attack Egypt if a US ally asked them for aid. Pascha took the threat to heart and refrained from sending any reinforcements, with the remaining Egyptian troops leaving Mexico together with the surviving French forces in 1867.⁴⁵ As the United States understood the Ottoman Empire and Egypt as Muslim powers, their actions during the Civil War may have indirectly influenced their opinions of Islam.

It is worth noting that the US foreign relations were not strained solely because of US actions. Life in the 19th-century Middle East and Northern Africa was turbulent for many reasons, the most prominent of which had little to do with the United States directly and everything to do with European states jockeying for power. From the 1830s all the way to the start of the 20th century, much of the Middle East was embroiled in what historians today call “the Great Game.” The Kingdom of Great Britain, the Russian Empire, and to a much lesser extent France, vied for influence in the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Afghanistan, India, and neighboring states. As historian David Fromkin explains, imperial Russia had been expanding into what is now referred to as the Middle East since the 18th-century, and most British people believed that the Russian Empire would eventually control the Ottoman Empire and Constantinople. British people only became concerned about this in the late 1820's when Russia's annexation of Persian and Ottoman territories threatened Britain's position in India, to the point where Great Britain feared that Russia might invade India, or encourage an Indian

45. Oren, 187

revolt against Britain.⁴⁶ While there is not much evidence to suggest Russia was actually going to do this, British concerns that Russia's expansion would upset the balance of power in Europe, threaten British naval communications, or disrupt British trade with Asia were realistic.⁴⁷ The British did not intend to conquer the Ottoman Empire, Persia, or Afghanistan, but to establish them as buffer states for India.⁴⁸ The conflict was waged in a similar manner to the Cold War, with Britain and Russia vying for influence through diplomatic treaties with the aforementioned powers and, at times, through proxy wars and conflicts. These included the First Afghan War (1838-1842), Crimean War (1853-1856), Anglo-Persian War (1857), Second Afghan War (1878-1880), and the Panjdeh Crisis of 1885, in which Russia and Britain nearly went to war with each other.⁴⁹

Although the United States was not directly involved in these conflicts, they had diplomatic and trade relations with Persia for at least part of the 19th century,⁵⁰ and there is evidence that American missionaries in Persia occasionally got caught in the middle of the Great Game. For example, the United States had no consul to Persia by 1880, so when Christian missionaries from the US found themselves in "great peril from the attitude of the Mohammedan

46. David Fromkin. "The Great Game in Asia." *Foreign Affairs* 58, no. 4 (1980): 937

47. *Ibid*, 939

48. Edward Ingraham. "Great Britain's Great Game: An Introduction." *The International History Review*, Apr., 1980, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Apr., 1980), 165

49. Fromkin, 940

50. The United States entered into a treaty with the Shah of Persia in 1857 establishing basic diplomatic guidelines regarding trade and how citizens from one state would be treated in the other state, and opening the door to consuls and plenipotentiaries in both states. [See "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings." *Pittsfield Sun* (Pittsfield, Massachusetts) LIX, no. 3035, November 18, 1858: [2].] This treaty was similar to others introduced to China, Japan, and Thailand, and legislation was passed to keep it in force in 1860. The treaty does not appear to have been renewed, as in 1878, there were suggestions about writing a new treaty [see "A Commercial Treaty with Persia." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 20, 1878: 2.].

population towards them,” the Secretary of State asked the British government to intervene for their protection.⁵¹ Later that year, the British Minister replied saying that they had intervened on their behalf, though he did not elaborate as to how. When the missionaries wrote of further difficulties in 1882, the British foreign minister expressed his concern that, because the Shah would not tolerate any interference in the religious belief of his Muslim subjects, intervening for the missionaries’ protection would in fact put them in greater peril. He could only hope that, given that they had received no further complaints from the missionaries, they were no longer in danger.⁵² US Representative Rufus Dawes responded to this situation by introducing a bill to give President Chester Arthur the authority to establish diplomatic relations with Persia,⁵³ though the President does not appear to have done so.

More concerns about Christian missionaries in Persia were raised when Shah Naser al-Din Shah Qajar was assassinated in 1896. The *New York Tribune* wrote that the old shah was “liberally minded,” and allowed Christian missionaries to practice, as long as they did not try to convert Muslims but the new shah was believed to be “a religious fanatic,” causing “great unease” in the missionaries. They also worried that one of Naser’s sons would start a civil war in an attempt to claim the throne, and that Russia would send in an army to quell it, forcing the missionaries to abandon their work in the region.⁵⁴ None of these events came to pass.

Nevertheless, this article demonstrates that Christian missionaries worried these possibilities, and

51. "AMERICANS IN PERSIA. Our Missionaries There Heretofore Under the Protection of Englund." [sic] Cincinnati Daily Gazette (Cincinnati, Ohio), April 20, 1882: 1

52. Ibid

53. Ibid

54. "Missions In Persia. The Work Which Is Threatened By The Shah's Assassination. Urumia College, Fiske." New York Tribune (New York, New York), May 4, 1896: 3. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

they were at least tangentially affected by the Great Game. As is demonstrated later in this chapter, Christian missionaries presented by far the most negative view of Islam in the US press. The threat the Great Game posed to their missions may have contributed to this view by making them feel as though they were under attack.

Many US newspapers commented on the Great Game even when it did not concern US citizens. The press was not unified in its opinions of the conflict. Some articles from this time period supported Russian annexation, since it would bring infrastructure, especially railroads, to these states and would help to regenerate their land,⁵⁵ others more predictably wrote in support of the British, in part for its ability to spread Christianity there,⁵⁶ and others had a more mixed opinion, conceding that Russia's money and infrastructure would benefit Persia, but lamenting the spread of Russian power.⁵⁷ Apart from commenting that Britain would be able to spread Christianity in Persia, most of the articles covering the Great Game do not talk about Islam or indeed the Muslim citizens of Afghanistan, Persia, or India. It was framed mostly as a conflict between Britain and Russia, two Christian powers, with Afghanistan, Persia and India, powers that just happened to have large Muslim populations, caught in the middle. This may be one reason why Muslims were so often portrayed as unfortunate people in less hateful publications, but there is not much direct evidence to suggest this.

55. See "The Famine and Pestilence in Persia-an Opening for Russia." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), July 30, 1871: 6. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

56. See "The Land of Persia and Its Changes." *Northern Christian Advocate* (Syracuse, New York) LI, no. 44, October 29, 1891: 5 "Traveling In Persia. It Means Much Hard Work and Great Discomfort., and The Shah's Empire Is." *National Baptist World* (Wichita, Kansas), November 23, 1894: 3. . The latter points out that Persia had entered into an agreement with a British contractor to establish railroads in Persia, but claims it fell through because of the "faithlessness and rapacity" of the Persian government.

57. See "Persia in Russia's Grip." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) 139, no. 151, November 28, 1898: 8.

In the late 19th century through the 20th century, many North African Muslims were caught in the Scramble for Africa, in which European powers scrambled to conquer areas of Africa and establish colonies in order to profit off of Africa's natural resources. African colonization and European rule over Africa were notoriously brutal and long lasting. As will be covered in depth later, plenty of American periodicals from this time period speak about Islam in Africa (especially with respect to the spread of Christianity in Muslim lands), and plenty also speak about European division of Africa, but the two subjects were rarely connected, so perceptions of the Scramble for Africa do not appear to have affected American public opinion about Islam, at least not during the 19th century.⁵⁸

Coverage of the turbulence in countries Americans understood as being Muslim may have informed Americans' opinions about Muslims indirectly. As will be discussed later in this chapter, most Christian and many secular publications presented a struggle between Christianity and Islam in the Ottoman Empire and other largely Muslim countries. This was presented as a battle between the civilized and the savage, the growing and the dying, and the true and the false, with the Christian "West" presented as the civilized future and the Muslim "East" or "Orient" portrayed as the savage past. Conflict and turbulence within the "Orient," no matter the cause, could indirectly influence this opinion by making the locals appear more savage due to the readers' confirmation bias and potentially the publications' framing. However, it appears to have been more directly shaped by popular publications and missionary accounts. These were very

58. For more information about the Scramble for Africa, see *Archives of Empire, Volume Two: The Scramble for Africa*. Edited by Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter, (Durham: Duke University Press) 2004., Muriel Chamberlain's *The Scramble for Africa*. 3rd ed. Harlow, England ; (New York: Longman), 2010

direct in their portrayals of Muslims, though the impression to be taken from them varied from publication to publication.

The Christian Press

By far the most negative impression of Islam to spread in the 19th-century United States came from Christian publications, most commonly missionary accounts. As Christian missionaries found little success attracting converts through traditional means, Christian missions varied in purpose. Some took the more traditional route of preaching the gospel, while many more established schools and hospitals which taught more American values. Such missionaries claimed that this work, “semi-secular” though it was, would “let the light” in to the Muslim world.⁵⁹ Although their activities varied, missionaries’ portrayals of Muslims did not vary as much. Their accounts served a few purposes: to illustrate the need for missionaries abroad, to explain what their activities abroad entailed, to celebrate the Gospel, and to inspire faith and vindication in Christians. To accomplish this first purpose, missionaries often emphasized the “ignorance” and “strange” or “barbarous” customs of the locals. The missionaries’ distaste was not reserved for Muslims, and Muslims were not the only locals to return that hostility, but they were treated as especially threatening for several reasons. The first reason was a practical one. In some areas of the Middle East, such as the Ottoman Empire, Christians were allowed to interact and attempt to convert Jews, local Christians, and other groups to Evangelical Christianity, but were actively forbidden from attempting to convert Muslims. Meanwhile, Muslim “proselytes” (the word Christian missionaries used for Muslim missionaries) were allowed to convert other people to Islam without restriction, and apparently

59. Oren, 215

found much more success at it, seemingly baffling the Christian missionaries.⁶⁰ This was one reason why Christian missionaries turned to semi-secular work as opposed to traditionally spreading the gospel; in theory, they would be able to reach more people that way, including the Muslims they were forbidden from preaching to.

A second, much simpler reason for their distaste was that Islam was far more widespread than these other religions, and so they encountered it more often and encountered more resistance from Muslims in addition to competing with Muslim “proselytes.” Although most missionary publications from this time period demonstrate their authors’ attitudes of superiority over people of other faiths and their absolute conviction that their cause was just, whether or not it would succeed was a subject for debate. Some publications held that they were making progress slowly but surely, and that “the crescent” (Islam) was waning. One example of this comes from the Boston area magazine *Zion’s Herald*. In 1872, it ran an article telling the likely symbolic story of a Christian preacher and a Maulvi in a religious debate in an Indian bazaar. The preacher in the article is easily able to parry any argument the maulvi tries to make while the maulvi is unable to answer any of the charges the preacher lobbs at Islam, as the maulvi does not really understand his own religion beyond rote memorization of Quranic passages. The maulvi leaves in a huff, and the Christian continues to preach the Gospel. The preacher holds this incident up as proof that Islam considers Christianity a threat and that “the crescent is waning...the day of Christ’s triumph hastens on.”⁶¹ Other publications lamented their lack of progress compared to Islam, but expressed the belief that Christianity would spread miraculously. For example, in 1873, the Philadelphia based African-American newspaper *The*

60. Ibid, 214

61. Brown, J. D. “A Musselman and a Christian in Debate: A Chapter From my India Journal”. *Zion’s Herald* (1868-1910). Mar 14, 1972

Christian Recorder reported that, even though “the Mohammedan States are, as a whole, in a condition of decay,” the number of pilgrims to Mecca continued to grow, as did the “numberless [Muslim] proselytes” who extended Islam’s reach into Africa. Nevertheless, the paper maintained that Islam was “a widespread delusion” and that “some day [sic], by a sudden and mighty overturning of public opinion, the Christian world, will be astonished and enraptured by seeing the complete downfall of [Islam] and the complete triumph of [Christianity].”⁶²

Not all Christian publications were certain of their success. For example, in 1867, The American Baptist Missionary Union’s magazine, *The Missionary Magazine*, published an article titled “Mohammedan Decay.” It portrayed Islam as “a sick man,” in the same way the Ottoman Empire continues to be, and its followers as living in a constant state of laziness, vice, or oppression. It further claimed that that “the unevangelized millions of our world are as dreary waste, painful even for the eyes of the Christian man to look upon.” Though the article asserts that “Christianity is living, and because living, must grow, must advance, must change-...[while] Islam is lifeless, cannot advance, cannot change,” it questioned how they could make progress among Muslim groups when they had had such little success before.⁶³ Though the author clearly believed their cause was just, it was by no means certain to succeed. This uncertainty about their success did not stop the missionaries from spreading the message that they were needed in Muslim countries. Although Muslims were regarded as a threat in Christian publications, they were typically portrayed as ignorant or pitiful beneath their heresy or fanaticism, and as people who would no doubt benefit from learning the Christian gospel.

62. “How Mohammedanism Lives” *The Christian Recorder*. September 25, 1873.

63. MOHAMMEDAN DECAY. *The Missionary Magazine* (1850-1872), 04, 1867. 117, <https://login.peach.conncoll.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/mohammedan-decay/docview/124325665/se-2?accountid=10255> (accessed January 21, 2021).

A third reason for the missionaries' distaste could be frustration with the locals or disillusionment with their work. Christian missionaries had previously believed that Islam, and indeed all religions apart from Christianity, were "spiritually bankrupt," and that believers in other religions only held onto them due to superstition and stubbornness.⁶⁴ Their extreme lack of success at attracting converts to Christianity coupled with local Muslims' success at attracting converts to Islam could have disproved that theory or else caused them to cling more tightly to it.

Next to "ignorant," "lazy," or "sick," the next most common descriptor missionaries applied to Muslims was "violent." Many Christian publications reported violent incidents against local Christians or else simply dismissed Muslims or Islam as violent. Although the latter perspective has its roots in the evangelical idea that Islam spread solely through conquest and forced conversion,⁶⁵ it would be unwise to dismiss all missionary accounts of violence against local Christians during this time period as fraudulent. Many 19th-century Christian missionaries worked in the Ottoman Empire on the eve of or even during the Hamidian Massacres, a series of mass murders against Armenians carried out on the orders of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. These took place from 1894 to 1896 and claimed an estimated 200,000 Armenian lives. The event is considered a precursor to the Armenian Genocide (1915-1917).⁶⁶ As historian Peter Balakian explains in *The Burning Tigris*, the massacres represented a horrific flash point, but Armenians had suffered under Ottoman rule long before they began.⁶⁷ Many more Christian missionaries worked in "Ooromiah," modern-day Urmia, Iran, on the eve of what is sometimes referred to as the Assyrian Genocide. This was a much lesser-known and less studied event in which Ottoman

64 Heyrman, 13

65 Heryman, 36

66. Balakian, Peter. *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers) 2003, xv

67. *Ibid*, 41.

soldiers killed Assyrians and other local Christians in Ottoman territory and the surrounding areas with the help of local Muslim groups such as Kurds.⁶⁸ As in the Hamidian Massacres, the killings represented a flash point, not the beginning of the violence. As Christian missionaries were legally barred from converting Muslims in the Ottoman Empire and tended to face a chilly reception from people of most other religions regardless of where they practiced, they attempted to evangelize local Christians, especially Armenians, so they could have witnessed violence against them first hand, and this is somewhat reflected in their correspondence.⁶⁹

One example of this type of article was printed in 1863 when, the *New York Evangelist* published an article titled “Musselman [sic] Fanaticism,” which told the story of a beautiful, virtuous Nestorian girl from Oroomiah who had been kidnapped “for malicious purpose” (rape) having “caught the evil eye of the son of one of the masters of her village.” She received no redress from the authorities in the village, and was instead incarcerated in the local judge’s harem and repeatedly compelled to convert to Islam. The girl apparently told them “torture me, cut me in pieces if you will. I will never give up my religion. I will die a Christian and be buried in a Christian grave.” Eventually, she fled her captivity to the missionary-run female seminary and was smuggled out of the village by these same Christian missionaries.⁷⁰ Though aspects of the story, such as the girl’s reported testimony from the harem, read like propaganda meant to inspire vindication and faith in Christian readers rather than as a cry for aid or justice for the mistreated Assyrians, violence against Assyrian women was not uncommon so this story is

68. Khosroeva, Anahit. "ASSYRIANS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE OFFICIAL TURKISH POLICY OF THEIR EXTERMINATION, 1890s–1918." In *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, 1913-1923*, edited by Shirinian George N., 105-32. NEW YORK; OXFORD: Berghahn Books, 2017

69. Oren, 215

70. J. G. C. (1863, Nov 26). “Our correspondence.: MUSSELMAN FANATICISM.” *New York Evangelist* (1830-1902), 34, 2.

possible. Christian publications were far from the only sources to cover violence against Armenian and Assyrian people; indeed, the secular press and the Christian press both described and condemned this kind of violence with relatively equal vitriol, especially during the aforementioned mass killings, but their conclusions were often different. As in the article above, Christian publications typically emphasized Islam as the cause for the violence, while secular publications might blame the Turkish Sultan or Turkish culture instead.

Although Christian missionaries represented a relatively small number of Americans abroad, they interacted with them the most often when compared to other citizens of the United States. As a result, they had a large influence over public opinion on Islam and in US diplomatic relations with Muslim nations even members of government, so their perspective was the most prominent and probably the most important in the United States at the time.

Edward Wilmot Blyden

Most Christian publications, especially those written by Christian missionaries, portrayed Islam entirely negatively, but Liberian pan-Africanist Edward Wilmot Blyden's work was an exception to this rule. Sometimes called the father of Pan-Africanism, Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) was an accomplished author and scholar, but, as Richard Brent Turner explains in *Islam in the African American Experience*, he was also a Christian pastor and Christian civilizationist, although he hated Christianity's "political and racial agenda" (that is, the further entrenchment of white supremacy).⁷¹ It is not entirely clear why Blyden became interested in Islam, but in the 1860s and 70s, he studied Arabic in Syria, and visited Muslim areas of Liberia and Sierra Leone, where he "became impressed by the level of learning among African Muslims

71. Richard Brent Turner. *Islam in the African American Experience*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press) 1997. 52

and by Islam's ability to unify African peoples."⁷² This is reflected in much of his work, including articles published in *The Christian Recorder*, a newspaper published by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Blyden's exchanges with the *Christian Recorder* demonstrate the mixed opinions about Islam in the 19th century, as well as the complexity and evolution of Blyden's feelings about the religion as he grew to view it not as an enemy to Christianity in Africa, but as a unifier of Africans and a potential stepping stone to Christianity.

In 1876, the *Christian Recorder* ran Blyden's article "Mohammedanism and the Negro Race," originally published in *Fraser's Magazine*. In this article, Blyden dismissed many of the common criticisms Christian missionaries had of Islam. He pointed out that many of their criticisms, such as Islam having consecrated "despotism...polygamy...[and] slavery" could just as easily be attributed to "worldly interests," posits that a Muslim scholar could just as easily and with just as much evidence accuse Christianity of consecrating "drunkenness...Negro slavery...[and] war" and asks "when we see so many evils known to be antagonistic towards the Christian religion still, after eighteen hundred years, prevalent in Christian lands, why should Mohammedanism be so assailed because, during twelve hundred years of its existence, it has not extirpated from the countries in which it prevails, all social evils?"⁷³ He also had an answer to Christian missionaries' confusion about why Christianity had failed to spread in Africa. He explained that Arab, Muslim missionaries to Africa typically lived among the people they were trying to convert for many years, became respected members of their communities, and even started families with them. As a result, people were converted "in a most natural manner" to Islam. Meanwhile, Christian missionaries set themselves up as separate and superior to the

72. Ibid, 51

73. Edward Wilmot Blyden, "Mohammedanism and the Negro Race." *The Christian Recorder*. Philadelphia, 1876. 1.

people they were trying to convert, and so the rare African convert to Christianity lost, in Blyden's words, "that sense of the dignity in human nature' which observant travelers have noted in the Mohammedan Negro." Perhaps most shockingly to the *Christian Recorder's* readers, Blyden expressed the belief that Islam, while inferior to Christianity, could nonetheless be a positive influence on Black Africans. He said that

Mohammedanism may, when mutual understandings are removed, be elevated, chastened, and purified by a Christian spirit...I can, therefore, look forward, if with something of anxiety, with still more hope, to what seems the destiny of Africa, that paganism and devil worship die out, and that the main part of the continent, if it cannot become Christian, will become what is next best to Mohammedan.⁷⁴

This comparative sanguinity was not shared by other contributors to the *Christian Recorder*.

Other contributors to *The Christian Recorder* often wrote about Blyden with respect, but where he expressed a kind of optimism regarding Islam's spread, they expressed frustration or despair. Three years prior, *The Christian Recorder* had published "How Mohammedanism Lives," an article lamenting the ease at which Islam spread through Africa, but expressing the hope that public opinion that, through a miraculous change, Christianity would become the dominant religion.⁷⁵ As was previously demonstrated, this tone was more common among Christian missionaries in the 19th century. There is some evidence that Blyden's perspective influenced contributors to the *Christian Recorder*, but they did not necessarily reach the conclusion he had hoped for. In 1880, a few years after Blyden's article was published, the *Christian Recorder* ran the article "Infidelity in Mohammedanism [sic]." This article agrees with Blyden's explanation for why Islam had spread quickly in Africa while Christianity had not, but

74. Ibid

75. "How Mohammedanism Lives" *The Christian Recorder*. Philadelphia. September 25, 1873

gives no credence to the idea that Islam could be beneficial. Instead, the author chastises white missionaries. The article reads;

We do not see how any white Churchmen, *if he be Christian*, can read the above and not abase himself to the very dust...at their door we do not hesitate to lay the burden of this double disaster to our race. Instead of proving true to the mission of leading Ethiopia to God, they have abused their trust, and today the Negro is found, in so far forth as they are concerned, with his face largely turned from Zion and from God.⁷⁶

Although the *Christian Recorder* wrote about Blyden with respect, his belief that Islam could be a positive influence or was in any way beneficial was unique among its contributors, and, judging by later events, were controversial among their readers.

Over time, Blyden's views about Islam grew more positive while he continued to criticize Christianity, causing some readers to believe that he had converted to Islam, to the dismay of his colleagues. In 1887, Blyden published the book *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, a collection of essays expressing his thoughts about those three topics and how they related to each other. Shortly after this book was published, the Recorder published a short column overviewing important events in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and one item on that list is "Dr. E.W. Blyden, LL. D, one of the best negro scholars, has left Christianity and joined himself to the Mohammedans."⁷⁷ A month later, one of his colleagues, a Reverend J.R. Frederick, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Christian Recorder* denying this. This letter was then published in January of the following year. According to Frederick, Blyden had not "left Christianity," at least not true Christianity, to become a Muslim, but that he was attempting to understand and work with Muslims, and in doing so, he had come to respect them. Blyden did not publish *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* because he had left Christianity but, as always, bore "hard on the Christianity of the white man" and wished to clear up misconceptions about Islam, as Blyden

76. "Infidelity in Mohammedanism." *The Christian Recorder*. Philadelphia. July 15, 1880.

77. "Personal" *The Christian Recorder*. Philadelphia. November 3, 1887.

believed in spreading the truth.⁷⁸ Where exactly the story that Blyden had converted came from is unclear, but Frederick certainly believed it was because he had published *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*. Blyden never mentions having converted to Islam or implies that he had in this book, although he does heavily critique “the Christianity of the Negroes” as a “grotesque and misshapen thing” thanks to the manner in which they received it (either through slavery or white missionaries)⁷⁹ and disputes European scholars’ conclusions about the Quran, in the process making clear that he had read and studied it closely.⁸⁰ In any case, that appears to have been the end of the discussion in the *Christian Recorder*, but not in modern scholarship. As Richard Brent Turner explains, there is no evidence that Blyden formally or publicly converted to Islam, but there is an argument to be made that Blyden was “spiritually a Muslim” or, as Turner postulates, had a dual religious identity which hovered somewhere in between Islam and Christianity.⁸¹ Regardless of Blyden’s religious beliefs, this incident demonstrates a binary in the United States’ Christian press. Even though Blyden very clearly enunciated his belief in the truth of Christianity and maintained this belief in *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, the fact that he wrote positively about Islam and had read the Quran was held up as proof that he was no longer a Christian. This type of binary was not present in more secular publications; instead, the secular press presented a variety of views about Islam.

The Secular Press

78. Frederick, J.R. “Has Dr. Blyden Gone Over to Moment [sic]?” *The Christian Recorder*. Philadelphia. January 12 1888.

79. Blyden, Edward W. *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*. Black Classic Press, 1994. 835. Digitized by Kindle Books.

80. Blyden, *Christianity Islam and the Negro Race*, 4737

81. Turner explains that Blyden resigned his clerical office in the Presbyterian Church in 1886, advocated for Muslim education, resigned his Arabic professorship at Liberia College due to “his attachment to Islam and his support for polygamy,” and “preferred to be in the company of Muslims” rather than Christians near the end of his life. (Turner, 58-59)

The Christian press nearly always presented a negative view of Islam, but the secular press printed much more varied opinions. Many articles offered a negative perspective about Islam, but others contained a more nuanced perspective, a somewhat positive perspective, or even attempted to educate people; even the negative perspectives were negative for different reasons than the Christian press. Unlike the Christian missionary press, whose goal was to report on their mission's progress, spread the gospel, inspire faith, or make the case for mass conversion, the secular US press did not have a shared agenda when it came to other religions, including Islam. As a result, there was no unified perspective about Islam in the 19th-century press, but there were a few common threads: Orientalist fascination with Muslims due to their foreign customs and beliefs (this was most common in travel journals), foreign diplomatic correspondence expressing pity or fear of Islam or blaming it for social ills abroad, and women's rights under Islam.

Thanks to the renewed interest and ability to travel following the end of the United States Civil War, travel journal-style articles and novels covering trips to the Middle East were common. Some of these articles were written by Christian clergymen, but not for a strictly Christian audience or for the purpose of advocating for missions or spreading the gospel. The purpose of such articles was more to entertain than to vindicate Christian readers. Many such pieces made comments about the locals, including the Muslim ones. They were often treated like pieces of scenery, and meant to conjure an image of the locals more than anything else. For example, in 1868, the South Carolina based Newspaper the *Abbeville Press* published "The Cave of Machpelah." The titular cave, also called the Cave of the Patriarchs, is a cave system which is now encased in the Ibrahimi Mosque, and is allegedly the burial site of Abraham, Isaac and several members of their family. The site was "sacredly guarded" by the local Muslims. Gage

explains that “from the time when Abraham had purchased it, down all the centuries of the Old Covenant, it remained in the hands of the Jews. The Christians then gained possession of it; then the Mohammedans grasped it, but the patriarchs, especially Abraham, were beloved in their eyes and suffered no detriment.” The Christian Crusaders then gained a hold of it again, and “relinquished it to the Mohammedans.” Although the Muslim locals had taken good care of it, the author described their continued hold on it as “the shame of the Christian world,” as he believed it should have been in the care of the local Jews, but that is the extent of his criticism, and most of the commentary is about the tomb itself or the Christians.⁸²

Articles that did focus on Islam might even complement the local Muslims, albeit backhandedly and amidst plenty of less complementary or outright orientalist writing. Ten years after they published “the Cave of Machpelah,” *The Abbeville Press and Banner* published another article titled “Life in Modern Egypt.” This article was written by an anonymous clergyman, and describes Cairo in colorful text that is typical of a travel journal. He says that

The greatest charm of Cairo is the street life. It is a moving panorama of all nationalities, creeds, languages, and costumes, with a strong preponderance of the Oriental and semi-barbarous element. It is a perpetual carnival, which defies description.

Most of the article goes on in this manner, portraying Egypt as exciting and exotic, and attempting to conjure an image. This could have been enjoyable to readers who wished to explore the world but did not have the money or the time to do so. There is some commentary about Islam in this article. The author describes the devotion with which Muslims perform their daily prayers, a devotion the author says “would put many Christians to shame,” but this is within a larger description of local mosques and customs, and is also intended to conjure an

82. Gage, W. L. “The Cave of Machpelah.” *The Abbeville Press and Banner*. Abbeville South Carolina, June 5 1868.

image and emphasize just how alien Egypt was from the West.⁸³ Some such articles covered Islam in more detail, again to emphasize the perceived strangeness of the religion and, by extension, the strangeness of land the traveler was visiting. In 1888, for example, when the *Fairfield News and Herald* published an article about Islamic schools in Turkey. The students learned to memorize the Quran through repetition, and the author emphasizes how bizarre this was to European visitors, saying

When the boys are learning their lessons, or repeating them to their master, they do so all at once in a loud voice, and with a continual see-saw of the body, without which movement they seem to conceive it impossible that any thing [sic] can be learned. The scene which this affords is extremely ludicrous to a European, particularly as the zeal of the learner is estimated by the loudness of voice and the violence of his seesaw.⁸⁴

As in the prior article, there is little commentary on Islam itself except to say that it is strange, and there is no suggestion that the introduction of Christianity would be at all beneficial to the locals. The goal of such articles was mainly to tell an entertaining story of an exoticized land to a majority white American or British audience,⁸⁵ and not to send a message beyond that. While white or Christian supremacy is often implied in such articles, spreading that message is not the point.

Sometimes, the article was very clearly written by a Christian author who believed in the superiority of Christianity over Islam. In 1860 the *Boston Recorder's* foreign correspondent wrote about travelling to Jerusalem and passing by a Muslim cemetery, where he encountered a group of Muslim women sitting among the tombs in mourning. At least one of these women cursed him as he passed. The author expressed pity for the women, saying they were “but

83. “Life in Modern Egypt.” *Abbeville Press and Banner*. Abbeville, South Carolina. 9 January 1878.

84. “Schools in Turkey.” *Fairfield News and Herald*. Winneboro, South Carolina. 24 October 1888

85. Many travel journals, like “Schools in Turkey” are reprints from British publications or were reprinted in British publications

menials in the Orient,” wondered if they “could have for each other and for the dead so great a love as prevails in Christian lands?” Though the author pities the women, there is no mention of conversion, nor is this held up as proof that Christianity must be brought to them in an effort to improve their situation, they are simply objects of pity.⁸⁶ Despite this brief social commentary the article is still, at its core, a travel journal, as it goes on to describe the incredible landscape and difficulties they had had on their long journey to Jerusalem. Even this criticism of Islam is only included as another way to emphasize the strangeness of the land they are in. The contributors’ emphasis on the bizarreness of Islam may not be as openly hateful as other publications, but if applied to Muslims already living in the US, has implications for how they were treated. Islam was treated as incompatible with western society and was, in the eyes of Christian missionaries and some secular publications, dangerous. Secular publications’ emphasis on the strange could also lead to negative treatment. The effects of this on local Muslims will be examined in chapter two.

Some travel journal authors did not buy into the idea of the exciting, exoticized, “Muslim East.” Although most travel writers attempted to make their time abroad sound exciting and wondrous, one of the most famous 19th-century travel journals does just the opposite. Mark Twain’s 1869 travel journal *The Innocents Abroad: Or the New Pilgrims’ Progress* helped to make him famous, and told the story of his journey through Europe, Northern Africa, and the Middle East, or as Twain put it “Europe and the Holy Land.” While most of his contemporaries portrayed this type of voyage as an exciting jaunt through a fascinating land, Twain portrayed it as often irritating, disappointing, and tedious. Although he has some positive thing to say about

86. "Foreign Correspondence." *Boston Recorder* (Boston, Massachusetts) XLV, no. 2, January 12, 1860: [5].

his journey, most of his fun was had with the other passengers or at their expense. Twain acknowledged this difference in tone in the book's preface, telling his readers "I offer no apologies for any departures from the usual style of travel-writing that may be charged against me, for I think I have seen with impartial eyes and I am sure I have written at least honestly, whether wisely or not."⁸⁷

In his signature humorous style, Twain describes the monotony of life at sea, the frequent storms, the absurdity, dreariness, and infrequent enjoyability of many of their jaunts off-ship, and, on occasion, Muslims he encountered on his travels. As one might expect given that Twain was a humorist, most of his descriptions of the Muslims he encounters are meant to be absurd or funny, but can be surprisingly typical in substance. His descriptions of Tangier are the closest in line with other travel journals, as he described it as "uncompromisingly foreign" and not portrayed accurately in any book save for "The Arabian Nights," and describes the Moors, Bedouins, and Jews wandering the streets in the usual, colorful tone of a 19th-century travel journal, focusing on their clothing and mannerisms more than anything else, and attempting to conjure an image for the reader.⁸⁸ He tells a few humorous anecdotes involving Islam. For example, on their second day in Morocco a man in their group named Bulcher attempted to enter a mosque, but was stopped by a local. Twain goes on to explain that, had Bulcher entered the mosque, he would likely have been stoned to death by its occupants,⁸⁹ but that there might have been a loophole. Apparently, the mosque had a clock in its tower which no Muslim in Tangier was able to repair, so they hired a Christian clockmaker to fix it. A "patriarch" (probably an

87. Twain, Mark. *The Innocents Abroad, Or the New Pilgrim's Progress*. (Hartford: American Publishing Company) 1878. v

88. Ibid, 79

89. Ibid, 83

Imam) at the mosque told his congregation “when mosques are builded [sic], asses bear the stones and the cement and cross the sacred threshold. Now therefore, send the Christian dog on all-fours and barefoot into the holy place to mend the clock, and let him go as an ass!” The clock was then mended.⁹⁰ Twain then insults Bulcher saying “therefore, if Bulcher ever sees the inside of a mosque, he will have to cast aside his humanity, and go in his natural character.”⁹¹ Twain’s tone when describing these incidents is much more humorous than most travel journals, but they are, in substance, very similar to other, secular writers’ portrayals of Muslims. The Muslims in *Innocents Abroad* are portrayed as strange and there is some suggestion of violence, but he does not portray them as the evil or even bloodthirsty characters so common in missionary writings.

Although many of Twain’s portrayals are typical of 19th-century authors, he departs from their portrayals in other ways. In particular, he excoriates William Cowper Prime’s portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in his novels.⁹² He had heard stories of the “dangerous Arabs” and “Bedouins” that were said to “infest” Palestine from Prime’s stories, but after having encountered a few in the desert, he was disappointed. When the guide told them that he did not wish to travel from Ain Mellahah for fear of encountering “ferocious Arabs” that would make camping dangerous, Twain sarcastically comments

Well, they [Arabs] ought to be dangerous. They carry a rusty old weather-beaten flintlock gun with a barrel that is longer than themselves...it will not carry farther than a brickbat, and is not half so certain. And the great sash they wear...has two or three absurd old horse pistols in it that are rusty from eternal disuse- weapons that would hang fire for just

90. Ibid, 84

91. Ibid, 84

92. Twain refers to him as “Wm. C. Grimes” throughout his novel and never names the book, explaining that “since I am treating it in the comprehensive capacity of a representative book, I have taken the liberty of giving both book and author fictitious names” on page 536, but it would have been easy enough for most of his readers to determine who he was really referring to as he quotes him directly and the pseudonym is very similar to Prime’s real name.

about long enough for you to walk out of range, and then burst and blow the Arab's head off. Exceedingly dangerous these sons of the desert are.⁹³ Twain himself never had any trouble with them. He claimed it "used to make his blood run cold" to read of Prime's escape from them and that it had contributed to his own fear of Arabs, but points out that even in those stories, they never attacked Prime and having now seen a few, Twain believed that they, never "intended to do anything to him in the first place, and wondered what in the mischief he was making all the to-do about."⁹⁴ He then dismissed this accepted story of the Bedouins as fraudulent, saying "I have seen this monster and I can outrun him."⁹⁵ He also chastises Americans for blindly accepting Prime's stories. For example, when they encountered a group of "Nazarene" women, several the pilgrims directly quoted Prime, saying "observe that tall and graceful girl; what queenly Madonna-like gracefulness of beauty is in her countenance" even though, according to Twain, all of them were short, homely, and boisterous.⁹⁶ Twain went on to declare that Prime "went through this peaceful land with one hand on his revolver, and another on his pocket handkerchief. Always, when he was not on the point of crying over a holy place, he was on the point of killing an Arab,⁹⁷" dismisses his stories as "gruel," and says "I love to quote from Grimes because he is so romantic. And because he seems to care but little whether he tells the truth or not, so he scares the reader or excites his envy beyond imagination."⁹⁸ The same criticism could be leveled at many other travel-writers from this time period, whose goal was to excite rather than inform. The same criticism could potentially be applied to Twain

93. Ibid, 483

94. Ibid, 484

95. Ibid

96. Ibid, 531

97. Ibid, 532

98. Ibid

himself as well as some of his writing is in the same orientalist wonder that other travel journals put out, but it is nowhere near as egregious as it is in Prime's tales.

Not all discussions of Islam in secular publications came from travel journals. Foreign correspondence also mentioned Islam, and some articles had the same opinions of Islam as the Christian press, but these articles were framed differently. Secular publications did not aim to attract support for Christian missions, nor did they necessarily wish to inspire faith or vindication in Christian readers. As a result, the type of pro-conversion and pro-evangelization rhetoric seen in articles from *The Christian Recorder* and other Christian publications is not as present. For example, in 1877 the South Carolina based newspaper *The News and Herald* published a scathing article titled "the Hateful Turk." The article lamented Assyrian and many other Christian ethnic groups' lack of rights under Turkish rule. They could not own property or arms, and if a Christian were to make a complaint in a court against a Muslim he would be "lucky to come away with his head." The article concludes by saying "he who would write the deeds of the Turk must dip his pen in the springs of Ghenna [hell]." Scathing though this article is, it is more nuanced than similar articles written in the Christian press. There is no naïve suggestion that mass conversion to Christianity could solve this problem, nor is Islam as a whole blamed for the Christians' suffering. The blame is put on Turkish Muslims specifically.

Beyond travel journals and foreign correspondence, Islam was sometimes mentioned in social commentary, especially having to do with women's rights. As in the Christian press, women in Islam were a common point of discussion, but not always for the same reasons. The Christian press almost universally portrayed Muslim women as oppressed and ignorant, or as glorified sex slaves, but the secular press invoked Muslim women for a variety of reasons in regards to women's rights. Until the 1890's, most of these articles were negative. Some spoke of

western women's need to help Muslim women. For example, in 1871, the *San Francisco Bulletin* article "Mohammedan Women" claimed that "a good field of operation for our enterprising sisters, who have assumed to rescue women from oppression, will be found in the land of Palestine...the condition of the Mohammedan women here is horribly degraded" and goes on to describe how Muslim women in Palestine toiled while their husbands sat around in cafes.⁹⁹ This may be intended as a jab at woman suffragists, who argued for women's rights and in doing so attempted to "rescue them from oppression." As Christine Leigh Heyrman explains, the American press wrote articles covering polygamy in Islam starting in the early 19th century. Such articles were written because they were attention grabbing and titillating due to their taboo subject, but also because they encouraged American women to be thankful for their privileges in the United States as, judging by these articles, they were better off than their Muslim sisters, no matter how many civil disabilities they faced.¹⁰⁰ This article may be following in that tradition, albeit sarcastically, or it may be a sincere call for international feminism.

Many articles in Christian and secular publications alike discussed polygamy as it related to Islam, and in this one regard, their opinion was more or less the same. For example, in 1892, the secular *New York Tribune* published the article "Islam: The History of the Caliphate" which stated that

Polygamy and servile concubinage are still as ever the curse and blight of Islam. By these may the unity of the household at any time be broken; the purity and virtue weakened of the family tie; the vigor of the upper classes sapped; and the throne itself liable to doubt or contested succession.¹⁰¹

99. "Mohammedan Women." *San Francisco Bulletin* (San Francisco, California) XXXI, no. 123, March 1, 1871

100. Heyrman, 64

101. "Islam. History Of The Caliphate." *New York Tribune* (New York, New York), April 3, 1892: 14.

A similar discourse about polygamy in Mormonism occurred during this time period as the Utah territory (at the time overwhelmingly Mormon) attempted to become a state. The newspapers that decried polygamy in Islam had the same reaction to polygamy in the Mormon church, or compared the two. For example, the *New York Herald* published an article describing Mormonism as “The American Islam” because its followers practiced polygamy.¹⁰²

Some authors writing in favor of women’s suffrage also invoked Islam to demand why American or European women had such few rights. The pro-women’s suffrage New York-based newspaper *The Revolution* responded to the news that several senators who supported women’s suffrage as a “sacred right” in the past had agreed that it be delayed in favor of suffrage for Black men by demanding “has this radical fanatic sect turned Mohammedan? Have the women, the fairest portion of creation, ceased to have souls to be saved? Have they no rights in society, no conjugal rights, no maternal instincts or duties to protect?”¹⁰³ US and British newspapers often claimed that the latter conditions represented life for a Muslim woman. The author of this piece is directly appealing to commonly held beliefs about Islam to suggest that American women had in effect been reduced to their state by not being allowed to vote. Ideally, this would have embarrassed an American, Christian audience, who were so used to reading publications that portrayed them as superior, and attracted them to the suffragists’ cause.

Many secular newspapers invoked Islam to say that Muslim women had fewer rights or to demand that American women not be reduced to their status, but some contemporary publications claimed that Muslim women, especially Turkish Muslim women, had more rights than they gave them credit for, and some even claimed that they were better off than British or

102. "The American Islam. A Glimpse of the True Inwardness of Polygamy." *New York Herald* (New York, New York) XLII, no. 156, June 5, 1877: 4

103. “Frank Blair on Women’s Suffrage.” [New York, NY] *The Revolution*, October 15th, 1868

American women. For example, in 1865 the New York-based magazine *Frank Leslie's Weekly* claimed that “a little acquaintance with Mohammedan law would cause the sticklers for woman’s rights to open their eyes rather wide. “Is the British female better off than her sister of Egypt or Bengal?... The Mohammedan lady retains her separate individuality in her married state. She is not placed in the position of a femme couverte; but remains...independent and responsible.”¹⁰⁴ and continued to list the rights the Muslim women had under Islamic law that a British or American woman did not. These types of articles were rare in the 1860s, but became more frequent in the 1890s. This is probably due to the expansion of women’s suffrage movements and women’s suffrage becoming a more mainstream political topic in the 1890s, as well as the influences of Mohammed Alexander Webb and his associates, whose competing New York-based Muslim missions were operational by 1894, as is discussed in chapter two.

The 19th-Century United States’ Press in Perspective

Thanks to the increased ability to travel following the end of the United States Civil War and the continuance of Christian missions abroad, more Americans wrote about travelling abroad, including their interactions with Muslims. Many of these impressions were negative, thanks to a combination of pre-existing prejudices, such as white or Christian supremacy, and observation of ethnic conflict in the regions they travelled to. Because of how wide the range of perspectives was, it would be unwise to assume that most Americans had one idea of Islam, but there were a few common threads, such as that Muslims were violent, ignorant, or, in the case of many travel journals, simply odd. The Christian press was especially negative, portraying Islam as a menace and Christianity as its eventual cure. Although some, like E.W. Blyden, tried to

104 “English and Mohammedan Marriages” *Frank Leslie's Weekly*, [New York, NY] July 22nd, 1865

counter this perspective somewhat, and some could be somewhat complimentary of Islam, most of them presented a negative perspective. Although the Christian press tended to vilify Muslims, secular travel journals tended to exoticize them. Chapters two and three will in part explore the consequences of this on Muslims living in the United States.

One aspect in which the United States was fairly unified was in their response to the Hamidian massacres (1894-1897), at the time referred to as the Armenian genocide and considered a precursor to the event now referred to as the Armenian genocide, (1917-1915). Though the killings did not begin until 1894, this event began in 1891 when Armenians in the Sasun region protested for tax reform. As Peter Balakian explains, double taxation by local Kurdish chieftains and the Ottoman government was “ruining the Armenian agrarian economy.” When the Armenians refused to pay the Kurds their usual tax, a fight ensued with one Kurd among the dead.¹⁰⁵ The Ottoman government blamed the Armenians for the incident, ordered a Kurdish invasion into Sasun and Moush, and claimed the Armenians were in armed revolt against Ottoman forces, when in reality they were hiding in the mountains.¹⁰⁶ The massacre began in June of 1894, when Armenians in Talori confronted an Ottoman military official and police who had arrived to collect their overdue taxes. Balakian explains that the Armenians agreed to pay Ottoman taxes if the troops would protect them from the Kurds. The Ottoman responded to the request by proceeding “to abuse and maltreat them” until the Armenian men “lost their temper”, and the officials were driven out in a scuffle. The officials reported that the Armenians were revolting, Kurdish troops arrived and more fighting broke out, and Sultan Abdul Hamid II, for whom the massacres are named, sent troops to Armenia to condemn the so-called

105. Balakian, 54

106 Ibid, 54-55

“Armenian rebellion.” This act resulted in the massacre and rape of around 3000 Armenians in Talori.¹⁰⁷ The event sent shockwaves through the Ottoman empire, as overdue taxes became an excuse to kill, rob, and rape Armenians all over the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁸ The massacres would continue until 1896, killing an estimated 80,000 to 300,000 people. Most of these were Armenians, but other Christian minorities, such as Assyrians, were attacked, too.

The massacres outraged the citizens of Britain and the United States. The latter responded to them by launching their first sophisticated humanitarian relief effort by sending not only money, but also nurses from the Red Cross, to assist the Armenians.¹⁰⁹ What to do about the massacres became one of the key issues of the Republican Party platform,¹¹⁰ and news of the massacres ignited a spirit of activism in the United States, as conservative, liberal, religious, and secular organizations alike raised funds to aid the Armenians.¹¹¹ The American press was also, for the most part, vehemently on Armenians’ side, but there was one prominent exception. Alexander Russell Webb’s publishing company, *The Moselm World and Voice of Islam*, wrote in favor of the Turkish government, and suggested that Armenians were in some way at fault for what happened or else were exaggerating. Whether he wrote this out of sincere belief or in a desperate bid to save his failing publishing company and mission are unclear, but either way, it was one of his last acts, or mistakes, as a journalist.

107 Ibid, 55

108 Ibid, 58

109. Balakian, 64

110. Ibid

111. Ibid, 70

Chapter Two

The “Yankee Mohammedans”: The American Islamic Propaganda and Competing American Muslim Missions in the 1890’s

Now, it is errors [in Americans’ understanding of Islam] as well as many others that have crept into the Western mind that we shall seek to overturn. Our plan of operation includes the establishment of a weekly high-class journal for the explanation of the Islamic doctrines as well as the dissemination of general information relative to Mohammedans and Mohammedan social laws; a free library and reading-room, a book and pamphlet publishing house, and a lecture room where lectures will be delivered once or twice a week, or as often as the circumstances seem to warrant.”¹¹²

–Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, 1892

On May 12th, 1893, the New York based magazine *The Moslem World* ran its introductory issue.¹¹³ Each of the publication’s issues contained articles written by Muslim scholars and staff writers, with the goal of giving its American readers an introduction to a religion its contributors believed was much maligned by the American press.¹¹⁴ At its head was Alexander Russell Webb (sometimes “Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb”). Frequently referred to in contemporary publications as “the Yankee Mohammedan,” he was the most prominent American convert to Islam of the 19th century, and founder of the American Islamic Propaganda, the United States’ first Muslim mission.¹¹⁵ For the next three years, Webb would work to spread his own brand of “philosophic Islam” in the United States, with his efforts ultimately coming to a close in 1896. This chapter will examine his movement’s impact, and that of similar, rival Islamic movements in New York City, all of which folded in 1895 or 1896.¹¹⁶

112. Excerpt from “Philosophical Islam,” a speech Webb delivered to potential backers in Hyderabad, India. In *The Three Lectures of Mohammed Alexander Russell Web, Esq.* (Madras: Lawrence Asylum Press) 1892. 52

113 Umar F. Abd-Allah. *A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb.* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2006). 191

114 Ibid, 193

115 Ibid, 160

116 Ibid. Ibid

Before describing the end of Mohammed A.R. Webb's career, we should start at its beginning.¹¹⁷ Alexander Russell Webb was raised Presbyterian, but found no satisfaction in Christianity as it failed to "satisfy the longings of his soul while meeting the demands of reason."¹¹⁸ While he admired Christianity's moral ethics, he did not see how they were different from those of any other major religion.¹¹⁹ Not finding satisfaction in agnosticism, atheism, or materialism either, he adopted other religions, first Buddhism and then Theosophy¹²⁰, while studying "materialistic science," claiming he was "intensely earnest" in his efforts to "solve the mysteries of life and death."¹²¹ Webb became interested in Islam in the 1880's, and in 1886, Webb initiated a lengthy correspondence with the future founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in order to learn more about Islam¹²².¹²³ A journalist by trade, Webb converted to Islam in 1891, while serving as President Grover Cleveland's consul to the Philippines.¹²⁴ In his efforts to learn more about Islam, he corresponded with Muslims in India and the English language Muslim press there, and became interested in spreading his new

117. For the researcher wishing to know more details about Mohammed A.R. Webb's biography beyond his work, historian Umar F. Abd-Allah's biography *A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb* offers an excellent comprehensive overview.

118. Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, *Islam in America: A Brief Statement of Mohammedanism and an Outline of American Islamic Propaganda*. (New York: Oriental Publishing Company). 1893. 12.

119. Ibid

120. Abd-Allah, 61

121. Webb, *Islam in America*, 17-18

122. Abd-Allah, 61

123. Webb's correspondence with Mirza Ghulam Ahmad lasted until 1887. The controversy around him emerged in 1891, when he claimed to be, "the Messiah Jesus returned to the world...the reincarnation of Krishna [an important Hindu deity], and the embodiment of the spirit of the Prophet Mohammed." By then Webb's correspondence with Ahmad had ended. Webb avoided mentioning this connection, and he does not appear to have been Ahmadiyya. Abd-Allah, 61-62

124. Abd-Allah, 101

religion in the United States.¹²⁵ Some of his letters were published, and they brought him to the attention of his long time benefactor and ally, Hajee Abdullah Arab, who proposed Webb tour India with him to attract donors for an American Muslim mission and periodical.¹²⁶ Webb resigned his post in Manila, and after a months long tour of India (during which he was allegedly given the name “Mohammed” by his benefactors), Webb returned to New York in February of 1893.¹²⁷ In a matter of months, he established the American Islamic Propaganda, the first Muslim mission in the United States. Webb judged his conversion to be the result of careful thought and consideration, and believed that his fellow Americans would follow suit if steered in the right direction.

Although Webb’s mission lasted only three years, was overshadowed by scandal, and did not inspire the mass conversion to Islam that Webb hoped it would, it is significant in what it can tell us about the United States’ opinions and understanding of Islam, and what it says about religion in the United States at the time. Webb became a prominent media figure and voice in shaping Americans’ understanding of Islam. Even his short-lived movement resulted in off-shoot movements with different principles and ideas for how “American Islam” should work. The very existence of his mission and the way he framed it speaks to existing religious tensions in the United States which would eventually result in the Third Great Awakening. This chapter will examine the life and work of Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, the American Islamic Propaganda, his brand of “Philosophical Islam,” and rival Islamic movements in New York City

125. Abd-Allah, 116

126. Ibid, 117

127. Ibid, 159

during the 1890's and will use newspaper articles, a variety of secondary sources, and Webb's own writings,¹²⁸ most prominently his leaflets, to do this.

Although Muslims lived in the United States (and what would become the United States) long before Webb brought a Muslim mission onto American soil, Webb's mission had the impact of forcing many Americans to briefly consider the possibility of Islam as an American religion. Many reacted with fascination or even tepid support, but others reacted with distrust, anger, or fear. In some ways, public reaction to Webb was a harbinger of the distrust future Muslim immigrants would face in the 20th century and today, although it is far from an exact replica as Webb was middle class and white while most of the aforementioned immigrants were people of color. As many Americans, even those who were not openly hateful, considered Islam to be at least alien to American culture, although a much smaller number believed it was antithetical to it, this could have been a significant step forward in terms of understanding, but Webb's blundering combined with Americans' pre-existing and long-entrenched prejudices proved to be too much, and the mission ultimately failed.

The American Islamic Propaganda

It should come as no surprise that the American press was captivated by Webb's Muslim mission. Until this point, even the more sanguine American publications had generally treated Islam as a foreign concept that was alien or even detrimental to the American way of life. The idea of a white, well-to-do, American man willingly converting to Islam and being inspired enough by it that he wished to spread it to other Americans was a direct contradiction of

128. Unfortunately, no copies of any of the newspapers Webb ran have been digitized and I am unable to travel across state lines to acquire the few issues still in existence thanks to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. However, according to the secondary sources that examine them, the sentiments expressed in his newspapers were the same as those expressed in the pamphlets he published, and some secondary sources quote them.

everything they had previously published. As a result, Webb's mission was horrifying to some, fascinating to others, and a curiosity to all.

The American press, especially the New York-based press, covered Webb's ventures extensively from the time they began. As a result, Webb became a bit of a celebrity. This was more for his novelty and antics than his religious convictions. News of Webb's venture spread quickly, first through the New York press, and then throughout the United States, and responses to it were, as should be expected, mixed. Much of the press was unsure of what to make of Webb and had no inkling of whether or not his mission would succeed. Exactly one week after Webb's return to the United States and before he had even found a headquarters for the American Islamic Propaganda, news of his mission made the front page of *The New York Times*. They published a long article on the subject which included an interview with Webb where he described his plans. In it, they describe Webb as "the American Mohammedan sent by wealthy Musselmans [sic] of the East- will print the Koran and build mosques- to start a weekly journal at once"¹²⁹ and explained Webb's plans for his mission. The article wryly tells the readers;

The "heathen" have turned the tables. The Christians of this land have built churches in India and Arabia. Now the Mohammedans propose to build mosques in the United States. The American Bible Society and American Christians have sent hundreds of thousands of Bibles and dollars and hundreds of missionaries... The Moslems intend to set up presses in New-York and run them at top speed so as to scatter the Quran broadcast.¹³⁰

This attitude that the tables had been turned, and even that this could be a good thing, was present in many articles, even some that criticized Webb. For example, in April of 1893, the

129. "Muhammed Webb's Mission." *The New York Times*. (New York: New York) February 25th 1893. 1 *The Times Machine*.

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1893/02/25/issue.html>

130. Ibid

Omaha World Herald expressed hope that few Americans would convert to Islam, but conceded that Christians had nothing to complain about. The article reads;

There is, of course, no more reason for us to resent the introduction of a new religion into the midst of us than there is for the East Indians to resent the introduction of our occidental religion. And it may be a rather wholesome experience for us to learn the simple truth that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.¹³¹

Some journalists were glad that Islam would be taught in the United States even if they were not sure they wanted people to convert to it. Commenting on the first issue of *The Moselm World* magazine (published in May of 1893), the *Worcester Daily Spy* stated;

It would be a startling climax if the dreams of those wealthy and sanguine Moslems should come to pass and their lately established propaganda should make converts in America...The crescent may or may not be destined to become a factor in the religious life of the New World, but M'd Webb's mission will at least teach some people what the Moslem religion really professes to be.¹³²

Many journalists had a negative opinion of Webb's venture for a variety of reasons.

Some wondered if Webb was sincere, with *The New York Herald* saying "it may be possible that there is some great commercial scheme back of it all by which trade will be for the first time opened with the Mohammedan nations, but Mohammed Webb declares that he only came here as a missionary to spread the word."¹³³ Predictably, many publications dismissed Webb's mission as a folly, often because they believed Islam was incompatible with American society or western civilization more generally. For example, *The Omaha World Herald* dismissed American Islam as a fad, and furthermore proclaimed "we hope that converts to the faith of the prophet of the middle ages will be few indeed; and the reason is not so much religious prejudice as a well-

131. "Mohammedanism is a Fad." *Omaha World-Herald* (Omaha, Nebraska), April 12, 1893: 4. *Readex: Readex AllSearch*.

132. "[Moslem; World; Mohammed; Alexander; Russell; Webb; America; Consul]." *Worcester Daily Spy* (Worcester, Massachusetts), May 25, 1893: 4.

133. "To Preach Moslemism. Ex-Consul Webb, Backed by Mohammedan Cash, Returns to America to Teach the Koran." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 57, February 26, 1893: 21. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

established conviction that the Mohammedanism can be identified only with a very inferior form of civilization.¹³⁴ At least one Christian newspaper, the Syracuse-based *Northern Christian Advocate*, dismissed Webb's efforts for the same reason many other Christian publications insisted that Islam was waning in the lands missionaries operated in; not based of any data or evidence suggesting it, but because they believed that it was Gospel-ordained destiny. The *Northern Christian Advocate* defiantly proclaimed

There is no disposition to be unkind to Mr. Webb, as he has undertaken the impossible, for the kingdoms of the world are to become Christ's, in spite of printer's ink, whether used in New York or California...since reason and bigotry tilted lances at Tours, there have been a thousand years of advancing Christianity...rash indeed is the man who attempts to plant the doctrines of the effete East in the soil of the western world.¹³⁵

Although the mission itself was, in practice, very modest, consisting of only a small reading room and press in addition to Webb's lectures,¹³⁶ Webb was in the US limelight almost immediately and would not leave it until two years after his mission folded. It seems that the spectacle of an American convert to Islam spreading his religion in the United States with the help of foreign money was enough to attract media attention, however small his venture was in practice.

The press's emphasis on Webb's foreign funding as the source of his mission continued throughout his tenure as a missionary. This distanced the mission's US roots, and it had the effect of rendering as "foreign" the American Islamic Propaganda and to a lesser extent, Webb himself. Rather than confronting the possibility of an American converting to Islam as the result of carefully studying it and coming to the conclusion that it was the true religion, many articles

134. "Mohammedanism is a Fad." *Omaha World-Herald* (Omaha, Nebraska), April 12, 1893: 4. *Readex: Readex AllSearch*

135. "Islam in America." *Northern Christian Advocate* (Syracuse, New York) LIII, no. 44, November 1, 1893: 8. *Readex: Readex AllSearch*.

136. Abd-Allah, 162

gave the impression that the mission was the result of a shady group of foreigners providing Webb with money. Webb's competing missions were not covered as extensively, and the people behind them were not subject to as much vitriol, perhaps because they received no foreign funding at all, although they did court it. Although many historians have concluded that, even though Webb encountered hostility, US Americans did not find the addition of Islam to be "discordant with American culture," this focus on his foreign funding might suggest otherwise.¹³⁷

Webb had big plans for his mission, and he did not hesitate to inform the press of them. His plan was three-fold; first, he would establish a "high class weekly journal" printed in English, then he would open a fully-fledged Muslim publishing house, which would print English language Qurans. As this happened, Indian Muslim missionaries would arrive to "personally evangelize people." Finally, they would build a mosque.¹³⁸ This plan never came to fruition, but the four story second headquarters of the American Islamic Propaganda, established in 1893, came close to it. These headquarters a lecture hall, a library, an informal mosque or "prayer room," and space for visiting missionaries and scholars on the first floor, in addition to the headquarters of the publishing company. His newspapers also ran on a monthly basis instead of a weekly basis due to a lack of funding.¹³⁹ Webb and his benefactors also briefly discussed buying land in the south to establish Muslim communities, primarily for Indian immigrants. As Brent Singleton explains in his article "Minarets in Dixie," his plan was based on the notion that wealthier Indian businessmen, and eventually wealthier Muslims for other countries, would

137 Singleton, Brent. "Heave Half a Brick at Him: Hate Crimes and Discrimination Against Muslim Converts in Late Victorian Liverpool." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. Vol. 37, 2017. 9

138. "Mohammed Webb's Mission"

139. Abd-Allah 163

immigrate to the United States to escape “high taxation by the British colonial regime” and to “live in a country where Islamic institutions were being established and constitutional freedoms held sway.¹⁴⁰” Although some of his backers also expressed enthusiasm for his plan, it was quickly abandoned as the proposed land was too expensive. This incident could perhaps be taken as foreshadowing, as the expense of Webb’s grand plans was one of the reasons his mission did not succeed in the long term.

According to Webb, the American Islamic Propaganda’s goal was to “present Islam to the people as plainly and logically as it is possible to present it, and to leave the results of its practical application to God.¹⁴¹” He was less openly concerned with specific religious practices and rituals, or personally evangelizing people. He remained focused on the philosophical and cerebral sides of Islam. Judging by his proposed plan to bring foreign Muslim missionaries and scholars to the US, such practices might have been adopted later had his mission persisted for longer. This focus on philosophy while eschewing most other religious practices would put him at odds with some of his colleagues and lead to questions about Webb’s sincerity later on.

Mohammed A.R. Webb’s Islam

The version of Islam Webb preached to his followers was not strictly based in Sunni, Shi’a, or any other branch of Islam. Instead, Webb preached what he called “philosophic Islam,” a version of Islam that had been specifically tailored to suit a middle-class American audience. Indeed, according to his interview with *the New York Times*, Webb openly refused to associate with the Muslims already living in New York as, according to him, they were mostly “peddlers and low-caste Hindus.¹⁴²” Webb explained that he believed the core of Islam was that “purity of

140. Brent Singleton, “Minarets in Dixie: Proposals to Introduce Islam in the American South.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. Vol. 26, Issue 3. 2006.

141. Webb, *The Three Lectures*, 51

142. “Muhammed Webb’s Mission”

thought, word, and deed, perfect mental and physical cleanliness, and steady, unwavering aspiration to God, coupled with pure, unselfish, fraternal love, are the principal ends sought and the means are as perfect as it as possible for a man to conceive of,”¹⁴³ and philosophic Islam reflected this belief. Philosophic Islam emphasized certain Muslim religious practices, particularly those relating to physical cleanliness and sexual morality, while de-emphasizing, altering, or outright ignoring other religious practices. It is understandable that Webb focused on these issues, as both were considered public health crises in the United States while his mission was in operation. In many if not most of his writings about Islam, Webb heavily emphasized the practice of wudu (although he always called it “woozoo”), or minor ablution,¹⁴⁴ and occasionally ghusl, or full ablution,¹⁴⁵ as signs of the truth of Islam. Regarding wudu, Webb explained

In order to show the solemnity and importance of prayer more plainly, as well as to secure the carrying out of another principle, the “Woozoo,” [sic] or ablution was ordered. It was his evident intention to impress upon his followers the idea of cleanliness in such ways as were the most effective and permanent, and in the rule of ablution, as in other rules, we readily see that he understood and appreciated the force of habit...In my opinion the Musselman [sic] who prays in soiled clothing violates the spirit of the law, no matter how thoroughly and carefully he has performed his “Woozoo” [sic]...[and] the floors of mosques and other places of prayer should be as nearly perfectly clean as it is possible to make them.¹⁴⁶

In Webb’s leaflet *A Guide to Namaz*, which explained the basics of Muslim prayer as Webb saw them and was designed to help potential converts pray properly, he emphasized ghusul as well,

143. Webb, *The Three Lectures*, 13

144. Generally, the practice of, among other things, washing the arms, hands, head, and feet to be ritually pure before prayer

145. Generally, the practice of washing the entire body if a state of major ritual impurity has been incurred (ex. after sexual intercourse, or before burial)

146. Webb, *The Three Lectures*, 14

as the desire for “perfect physical cleanliness” was one of Islam’s virtues, and one of the reasons why he believed it was the better faith.¹⁴⁷

Both wudu and ghusl are important religious practices for many Muslims, but Webb’s extreme focus on them as proof of Islam’s truth along may have been due to the influence of the Sanitarian movement. As historian Nancy Tomes explains in *The Gospel of Germs*, germ theory (the idea that diseases were spread by microbes) was just displacing sanitary science (the theory that diseases were spread by the “miasma” evaporating off of “human waste and organic decay”) as the leading theory of disease in the late 19th century.¹⁴⁸ Early understandings of germ theory were based in understandings of sanitary science, which placed emphasis on personal cleanliness, even though they never suggested that this was sufficient to prevent disease and recognized the need for “strong public health boards and municipal sanitary reforms,¹⁴⁹” to truly prevent the spread of illness. Even as germ theory started to replace sanitary science, most Americans in Webb’s target audience would have lived through the time period where sanitary science was more ubiquitous, and appealing to it may have been enticing nonetheless. Webb may have been drawn to these practices in particular because of their practicality when looked at through the lens of sanitary science, in addition to any religious connotation, and emphasized it in his writings in the hopes that other Americans would feel the same.

Philosophic Islam also emphasized belief in science and reason as Webb believed that Islam was the only religion that was fully compatible with both.¹⁵⁰ He emphasized it as he

147. Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, *A Guide to Namaz: A Detailed Exposition of The Moslem Order of Ablutions and Prayer With a Review of the Five Pillars of Practice*. (New York: The Moslem World Publishing Company). 1893 8

148. Nancy Tomes. *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe In American Life*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). 8

149. *Ibid*, 52

150. Webb, *The Three Lectures*, 4

believed “appeals to mawkish sentimentality are losing their force and effectiveness. And the more fully-developed classes -the clear-headed, well balanced, rational thinkers- demand a reason for everything.¹⁵¹” His belief in the compatibility of Islam with reason and science was more due to history than theology, as according to Webb, it was “a well-known fact that the course of Western progress has always been obstructed by the Christian Church, ever since the church has had an existence. It has always stood in front of the procession and shouted with uplifted hands ‘you mustn’t go any further or you will demean and degrade me.¹⁵²” Webb’s attitude could be considered a direct result of the Third Great Awakening (1890-1920), or the tensions which caused it. As William G. McLoughlin explains in *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reforms*, the 1890’s were a time of great tension in American churches, as a combination of labor unrest, industrialism, higher rates of education, and greater acceptance of scientific theories such as Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, challenged the foundations of evangelicalism and previously accepted Christian theology in the United States.¹⁵³ As many American Christians, especially those who were “rural folk...less well-educated, and less well-off” clung to evangelism,¹⁵⁴ and evangelist preachers like Billy Sunday openly attacked new scientific developments as heresy,¹⁵⁵ many middle-class Americans attempted to reconcile science and their faith. As a result, many Christians in the United States turned to less literal protestant movements such as Modernism and Social Gospel, which emphasized Christianity’s moral teachings while reinterpreting or disregarding the parts of it that were irreconcilable with

151. ----- *Islam in America*, 7

152. ----- *The Three Lectures*, 36

153. William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reforms*. (London: University of Chicago Press) 1978. 151

154. *Ibid*, 146

155. *Ibid*, 146

science.¹⁵⁶ Although the Third Great Awakening is typically associated with Christianity, some Americans rejected Christianity entirely in the face of these pressures, and turned to other religions or agnosticism. Webb responded to these same pressures by studying and eventually converting to the type of Islam he then tried to spread to other Americans. His statement that “mawkish sentimentality” was losing its effectiveness is a direct allusion to the emotional appeals evangelical preachers made in their efforts to show the truth of Christianity, with Sunday being one of the most famous examples.

Webb was frequently asked about and discussed his views of polygamy, which Webb described as the “great bugbear¹⁵⁷” to Americans. As was discussed in chapter one, Christian and secular publications in the United States decried polygamy with nearly equal disdain, so Webb could not avoid being asked about it. Rather than condemning it, though, Webb framed it as potential cure for “social ills,” such as prostitution. He specifically said

I know very little of the practical application of the purdah system or of polygamy in the East, and therefore cannot say whether they are applied in the Islamic spirit or not...but in my humble opinion, the purdah system and polygamy, rationally and intelligently engrafted on our social system, are the only possible remedies for the evils with which it is afflicted today. Prostitution, marital infidelity, drunkenness and kindred vices are prevalent from one end of the vast country to the other.¹⁵⁸

This type of framing could have potentially appealed to middle class Americans’ views of vice, as prostitution, marital infidelity, and drunkenness were all seen as serious social ills for Webb’s entire life,¹⁵⁹ but he waffled on this topic, and judging by Webb’s reception this type of disclaimer was not enough to appeal to most Americans.

156. Ibid, 161

157. Webb, *The Three Lectures* 33

158. Ibid, 51

159. See Amy Werbel’s *Lust on Trial: Censorship and the Rise of American Obscenity in the Age of Anthony Comstock* (New York: Columbia University Press) 2018., and Brian Donovan’s

The contours of Webb's religious beliefs are important to understand when trying to assess the initial success and eventual failure of the American Islamic Propaganda. Webb's vision of Islam was specifically presented in a way that was meant to be appealing to a middle-class American audience, and as a middle-class American himself, he understood the cultural context it was being applied to. In this way, Webb avoided one prominent mistake Christian missionaries made during this time period in terms of converting people, and that was applying their own world view and culture onto the people they were trying to convert without understanding their culture. Although there were plenty of other reasons why Christian missionaries gained few converts from their efforts (and, in the same vein, many reasons why Webb's mission folded relatively quickly) Webb's adapted form of Islam coupled with the existing religious tensions at the time gave him some reason to believe that Americans were ripe for conversion and that his movement would attract followers. Why it ultimately failed goes further than Americans' disdain or distrust of Islam.

The Chicago World's Fair and World Parliament of Religions

If Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb was not already a household name by March of 1893, he became one after speaking at the World Parliament of Religions in September of 1893. A seventeen-day long assembly held as a part of the Chicago World's Fair and Columbian Exposition, the parliament was assembled with the goal of "uniting religion against all irreligion;" of setting forth 'their common aim and common grounds of all union,' of helping secure 'the common unity of mankind in the service of God and man'; and 'indicating the

White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti Vice Activism, 1887-1912 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press) 2006.,

impregnable foundations of theism.¹⁶⁰” Representatives of many of the world’s major religions, including several denominations of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Parsi or Zoroastrianism, and Confucianism,¹⁶¹ gathered in Chicago to deliver a series of lectures about their respective religions, find common ground, and discuss religion more broadly.¹⁶² Arguably the poorest represented religion of those presented was Islam, with only three representatives in attendance.¹⁶³ Those representatives were a Frenchman named Sanna Abbou Naddara, who refused to speak of Islam’s holiness as he was not an Imam and “feared he would defame” his religio,¹⁶⁴ George Washburn, the American, Christian-missionary president of Robert College in Constantinople, who portrayed Islam as standing in the way of Christianity’s spread, while conceding that Islam and Christianity were “brethren” thanks to their “common father” and “one in our hatred of evil and in our desire for the triumph of the kingdom of God,¹⁶⁵” and finally, Webb himself.

Webb delivered two speeches over the course of the Parliament. On the tenth day of the parliament, he delivered the first one, “The Spirit of Islam.” In this address, he began by denying that Islam or the Quran supported polygamy, and denied that it should be spread “by the

160. Richard Hughes Seager, *The World’s Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press). 1995. xxiv

161. There is debate over whether Confucianism is a religion or a philosophy, however the Parliament represented it as a religion

162. The History of the Parliament.” In *The World’s Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World’s First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection With the Columbian Exposition of 1893, v. 1*. Edited by John Henry Barrows. (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company) 1893. 127-128

163. The parliament had hoped that more Muslim representatives would attend, specifically Turkish Muslims, but Sultan Abd al-Hamid II opposed the parliament. It is not entirely clear why he did this, as representatives from Turkey were present at the rest of the World’s Fair, but it may have been due to the presence of Armenian Christians or American Christian missionaries at the conference (Abd-Allah, 221)

164. Seager, 101,

165. Ibid, 102

sword,¹⁶⁶” as many Americans had called Islam “the religion of the sword.” After dismissing these charges, he went on to proclaim the virtues of Islam, among them brotherhood, discipline, and the performance of ablutions.¹⁶⁷ He also announced the opening of the American Islamic propaganda, with his reason for opening it being faith in his countrymen. More specifically, he said “I do not propose to take a sword in one hand at the Koran in the other and go through the world killing everyone who does not say... ‘There is no God but one and Mohammed is the prophet of god.’ But I have faith in the American intellect, in the American intelligence, and in the American love of fair play, and will defy any intelligent man to understand Islam and not love it.¹⁶⁸” He closed by denouncing Americans’ mischaracterizations of Islam, explaining that “there is no system that has been so willfully and persistently misrepresented as Islam, both by writers of so-called history and by the newspaper press” and repeating that he had faith in the intelligence of his countrymen.¹⁶⁹ Ironically given his optimism, this first speech was one of the worst received at the parliament. “The History of the Parliament,” a section of *The World’s Parliament of Religions, Volume One* that details the daily proceedings of the Parliament describes Webb’s address as follows;

[His speech] was an exceptional event in the proceedings of the Parliament, for the fact that it was attended with strong and even violent and impatient expressions of disapproval on the part of the hearers. At the outset of the paper...these demonstrations, in the form of hisses and cries of “Shame!” were so emphatic that the speaker seemed deterred from pursuing the line of discourse on which he had entered. Concerning this solitary incident of the kind in the whole seventeen days, three remarks require to be made

166. Mohammed Webb. “The Spirit of Islam” in *The World’s Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World’s First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection With the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, v. 2. Edited by John Henry Barrows. (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company) 1893. 988-989

167. Ibid, 993-994

168. Ibid, 990

169. Ibid, 996

- 1) It was a sudden, unpremeditated outburst of feeling, which the conductors of the parliament tried in vain to repress
- 2) It was occasioned not by any doctrinal statement, but what was taken for an attack on a fundamental principle of social morality
- 3) As soon as the speaker turned from this to a more appropriate line of discourse, he was heard with patient attention and even with applause.¹⁷⁰

Although it does not say what the offensive topic was exactly, it mentions that Webb discussed at the “outset of the paper,” and that it was perceived as being against a “fundamental principle of social morality,” so it probably referred to polygamy, as Webb discussed it almost immediately. This was not the first time that Webb or his associates’ lectures were met with this type of angry reaction, nor would it be the last, but that the fact that only Webb provoked this kind of reaction at the World Parliament of Religions speaks to just how controversial Islam, or at least polygamy, was in the United States.

Webb’s second speech, delivered on the eleventh day of the parliament, was titled “Islam and the Social Condition.” He discussed some of the same information related to polygamy and the spread of Islam described in “The Spirit of Islam.” However, Webb went further in explaining why he believed Islam was the truth. He explained that Islam’s “pillars of practice are physical and mental cleanliness, prayer, fasting, fraternity, alms-giving, and pilgrimage. There is nothing in it that tends to immorality, social degradation, superstition, nor fanaticism. On the contrary it leads to all that is purest and noblest in the human character.¹⁷¹” He also gave a positive opinion of Islam as it related to women’s rights, noting that “the property rights that

170. “The History of the Parliament.” In *The World’s Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World’s First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection With the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, v. 2. Edited by John Henry Barrows. (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company) 1893. 127-128

171. Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb “Islam and the Social Condition” in *The World’s Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World’s First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection With the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, vol. 2. Edited by John Henry Barrows. (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company) 1893. 1048

American women have enjoyed for only a few years have been enjoyed by Mohammedan women for twelve hundred years¹⁷²” and that under Islam a woman’s rights “are accorded to her freely” as they “find their pleasure and recreation” in the “peaceful and refining occupations of domestic life.¹⁷³” He also spoke fondly of the “brotherhood” and “charity” he had observed in Muslim communities (probably the ones he visited in India while attempting to attract donors).¹⁷⁴ Finally, he asserted that Muslims (especially “Spanish Moors”) were responsible for western civilization as they knew it then, as they had brought them “literature and science...mathematics, astronomy, and botany, history, philosophy, and jurisprudence” and that Muslim influence could be found “wherever there is a manifestation of materialistic progress and enlightenment.¹⁷⁵” This speech was much better received. “The History of the Parliament” merely notes that “Mr. Webb was received by the audience, on this occasion, with some slight expressions of applause.¹⁷⁶”

The last mention of Webb came on the twelfth day on the parliament, when Rev. Dr. George Post (a Christian missionary who operated in Beirut, Syria) responded to Webb’s speeches by reading several sections of the Quran he interpreted as supporting polygamy and the spread of Islam by force.¹⁷⁷ No other speakers at the World Parliament of Religions received a direct rebuttal, as this was against the parliament’s goals of mutual understanding. The fact that this rebuttal occurred and was allowed speaks to Christian Missionary’s belief that Islam was a threat, not just another religion, but also at the threat Webb himself could have potentially posed.

172. Ibid, 1048

173. Ibid, 1050

174. Ibid, 1051

175. Ibid, 1051

176. “The History of the Parliament.” In *The World’s Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World’s First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection With the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, v. 2. Edited by John Henry Barrows. (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company) 1893. 136

177. Ibid, 140

Abbou Naddara did not receive a rebuttal as he was not attempting to convert anyone, and therefore posed no threat to the missionaries.

The Parliament of the World's Religions was Webb's largest foray into the American public eye, but Webb had already earned his reputation as "the Yankee Mohammedan" by then, and his very presence appears to have caused a stir. Some publications, like *The Daily Inter Ocean*¹⁷⁸ and *The Wheeling Register*, simply reported that Webb's discussion of polygamy caused an uproar, but that other portions of his speeches were better received,¹⁷⁹ but others were openly hostile to Webb. Although they had initially dismissed Webb as an unfortunate fool, *The Omaha World Herald* responded to the Parliament by labeling Webb as "an impudent intruder," proclaiming that Americans "knew too much of true companionship, had too much evidence of the happiness possible in the Christian home, and are too much imbued with the sanctity and the poetry of love to listen to the prattlings [sic] of a man who would bring back the degradation, the jealousies, the slavery, and animalism of the Oriental "heaven," finally concluding by suggesting that Webb leave the United States for a Muslim country, as they would be more amenable to him.¹⁸⁰ This suggests that they, like George Post, now considered Webb a threat, and not just an odd man.

Although he had defended the practice of polygamy in his past writings, Webb did not do so at the World Parliament of Religions, merely stating that the Quran did not advocate for it, but the mere mention of the practice was enough to anger the audience. *The Omaha World Herald*

178. "Webb Defends Islam. the American Apostle Says He Was the Best of Men." *Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago, Illinois) XXII, no. 179, September 21, 1893. 1

179. "Stirring Religious Strife. Free Thinkers Shall Not Think in Bonny's Hall-Mohammed Webb Habled Down." *Wheeling Register* (Wheeling, West Virginia) 29, no. 71, September 21, 1893:

180. "An Impudent Intruder" *Omaha World-Herald* (Omaha, Nebraska), September 23, 1893: 4. (Continue bibliography from here)

even suggested that he had advocated for slavery, although he did no such thing. The article hinges on his mention of polygamy, but is really expressing anger over an American believing in Islam by tarring him with the same brush that Christian missionaries tarred all Muslims with. Although *The Omaha World Herald's* reaction was extreme, similar outbursts occurred at Webb's lectures and those of his associates, limiting their effectiveness at spreading their message. This would be a common theme throughout his mission, and may be one of several reasons why it folded so quickly.

Webb's response at the World Parliament of Religions was a harbinger of the response he would receive throughout his time as a missionary. While some politely listened, as the audience did in the second speech, he also received plenty of negative backlash, as he received after his first speech. This can be blamed on Americans' misconceptions of Islam and partially on Webb's faults as an orator, where his desire to be right sometimes compromised his ability to be persuasive.

Early Successes of the American Islamic Propaganda

By some accounts, the American Islamic Propaganda had early successes. Lectures were held at the American Islamic Propaganda's headquarters every Friday and Sunday,¹⁸¹ and news reports indicate that Webb lectured mostly in New York, but also elsewhere in the United States to a variety of groups, although their attendance and response varied substantially. Many prominent figures and intellectuals attended his discussions. These included a lecture at the home of the former consul to Thailand, David Sickles. Among those in attendance were the authors Mark Twain and F. Marion Crawford, Colonel Robert Ingersoll, sometimes called "the great

181. "A Moslem Propaganda. Mohammedan Webb Establishes Headquarters at New York." *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, Utah), October 13, 1893: 16.

agnostic.” He delivered this speech without incident.¹⁸² In April that same year, *The New York Herald* reported that he had delivered a lecture to the “Liberal Club.” This probably refers to the National Liberal League, which advocated for a purely secular government.¹⁸³ According to *the New York Herald*, this lecture inspired a discussion following a small uproar when a man climbed onto the stage and insisted on reading a Christian missionary’s letter about Muslims aloud.¹⁸⁴ Such outbursts were common at Webb’s lectures and those of his opponents, and Webb usually responded to them with amusement or, at worst, mild annoyance. Webb also delivered a lecture to New York’s Aryan Theosophical Society, as Webb himself was a former Theosophist and believed that they were ripe for conversion.¹⁸⁵ These lectures were fairly well attended.

Whether people attended Webb’s lectures to seek out a new religion for themselves, out of intellectual curiosity, or just to reject his message altogether, as some people did, is not knowable, but their presence proves that he managed to spread his message, whether or not it was accepted. The people he lectured to also points towards Webb’s sincerity; he presented his arguments towards people of other religions and even those who were openly hostile to religion. This suggests that Webb sincerely desired to spread his religion to all who would listen, diminishing the arguments of those who suggested that his conversion and mission were an act or performed solely for financial gain. It also suggests that, at least for upper class circles,

182. "He Trusts in Islam. Mohammed Alexander Webb Wants America to Share His Faith." *Kansas City Times* (Kansas City, Missouri), March 19, 1893: 19. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*

183. "NATIONAL LIBERAL LEAGUE.: OPENING OF THE SEVENTH ANNUAL CONGRESS IN MILWAUKEE." 1883.*New York Times* (1857-1922), Sep 22, 5

184. "Stirred up His Audience. Dr. Webb's Exposition of Mohammed's Teachings Severely Criticised [sic] by Members of the Liberal Club." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 98, April 8, 1893: 10

185. "Mohammed Webb Talks to Theosophists." *New York Tribune* (New York, New York), March 8, 1893: 3

Webb's mission and Islam were curiosities, although again, whether most attendees wished to learn about, convert to, or dismiss Islam is unknowable, though it was most likely a mixture.

Webb's publication, *The Moslem World*, also had some early successes. Webb received many letters from Americans who were studying Islam, and these letters were then published in the paper. Some people claimed they had converted to Islam, but most commonly, they suggested that more Americans should read *The Moslem World*, as it might "do them so good" to understand Islam better.¹⁸⁶ In addition to publishing the newspaper, Webb's publishing companies published a few leaflets, including *Islam in America*, which summarized his views of Islam, why it was a superior religion, and why Americans should follow it,¹⁸⁷ and *A Guide to Namaz*, which explained prayer in Islam and gave potential American converts the tools to perform Namaz and ablutions.¹⁸⁸ It also distributed a third leaflet, *The Three Lectures of Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb*, which contained the three speeches he had delivered in India to attract backers, but these were not published by his company, just distributed by it.¹⁸⁹ How many people bought these leaflets is unknown.

Although the paper may have interested some, and perhaps encouraged a few to convert, it was far from a financial success, as by Webb's own admission, the paper never turned a profit, and the distribution was small, at around 400 subscriptions.¹⁹⁰ The American Islamic Propaganda was a mission, not a business, so it also gave away copies of the *Moslem World* for free, so its

186. Brent Singleton, "The Moslem World:" A History of America's Earliest Islamic Newspaper and its Successors." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 27, 297-307. 300

187. Webb, *Islam in America*

188. -----, *A Guide to Namaz*

189. -----, *The Three Lectures of Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb*

190. In the last newspaper Webb ever printed, an edition of *The Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, he received \$3,256.99 less than he had been promised from Hajee Abdullah Arab, while receiving only \$518.97 in subscriptions (totaling a little under 500 subscriptions total) Abd-Allah, 258

circulation may have been larger. Many of these were donated for use by the American Moslem Brotherhood (a set of loosely-affiliated Muslim study circles in several US cities which were connected to the American Islamic Propaganda) and “any indigent person who inquired.”¹⁹¹ While this is logical from a religious perspective and, again, speaks to Webb’s sincerity, it may have also hurt his profits and lessened the mission’s chance of succeeding. The newspaper was able to attract some advertisers,¹⁹² so this may have helped Webb’s profits somewhat, but not enough to keep the paper afloat. *The Moslem World* ran monthly for seven issues from May until October of 1893, until a lack of funds forced Webb to stop printing it.¹⁹³ Any curiosity Americans had about Webb or Islam was apparently not enough for him to turn a profit attempting to inform or convert them. Poor distribution and a somewhat chilly press reception may have been the least of Webb’s concerns, however. These initial concerns were quickly overshadowed by something even more troublesome; a series of splinter movements which split Webb’s audience, pulled some of his funding, and damaged his reputation.

Splinter Movements

One of the most prominent reasons for the eventual collapse of the American Islamic Propaganda was the emergence of splinter movements in its second year of operation. While unity in the early days of the movement would have been essential in providing the sense of community that many religious people enjoy, the schism made such a community more difficult to create and maintain. It was also publicly embarrassing to Webb and his existing followers, and potentially off-putting to those who might have otherwise explored Islam.

191. Brent Singleton, “The Moslem World:” A History of America’s Earliest Islamic Newspaper and its Successors.” 301

192. Ibid, 301

193. Abd-Allah, 191

The exact causes of the split at the American Islamic Propaganda vary depending on what source you consult, but the indisputable facts are as follows. In late 1893, John A. Lant, an editor for the Moslem World Publishing Company, and Emin Nabokoff, a friend of Lant's who was a member of the American Moslem Brotherhood but was not on Webb's staff, left the American Islamic Propaganda to form their own New York based Muslim mission, The First Society for the Study of Islam in America.¹⁹⁴ This mission is far less studied than Webb's and is not as well documented, but by some metrics, it was more successful than the American Islamic Propaganda. The rival missions attracted scandal and press attention due to Webb, Nabokoff, and Lant's very public feud from 1894 to 1895 and Nabokoff and Lant's belligerence when compared to Webb. After the Society's first meeting, held on December 10th 1893, Nabokoff told *The New York Herald* that the Society "had nothing to do with Mr. Webb and that their views differed in several respects" and also that the society was more orthodox than the American Islamic Propaganda.¹⁹⁵ As to what he meant exactly, he was probably referring to the further use of Quranic text and ritual within the Society as compared to the Propaganda. While meetings of the American Islamic Propaganda typically boiled down to a lecture or study hall, the Society held services, which began with a call to prayer and the reading of passages from the Quran.¹⁹⁶ In practice, though, their beliefs appear to have been very similar. Nabokoff also mentioned

194. Singleton, Brent. "Brothers at Odds: Rival Islamic Movements in Late Nineteenth Century New York City." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 3, 2007. 473

195. "Scoffed at the Christian Faith Two Preachers of Mohammedanism Give Their Views in Strong Language Called Ministers 'Nuisances'." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 20930, December 11, 1893: 11. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*

196. "Mohammedanism in New York." *Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago, Illinois) XXII, no. 260, December 11, 1893: 3. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*

consistence with science and the belief in cleanliness as reasons to follow Islam.¹⁹⁷ Both Lant and Nabokoff also fielded questions about polygamy and women under Islam, and Nabokoff's answer that all good Muslims "hoped polygamy would be wiped out," is fairly consistent with the beliefs Webb expressed at the World Parliament of Religions.¹⁹⁸ While Nabokoff claimed that his mission was more orthodox, it did not strictly follow Muslim religious practices either, as its meetings were held on Sundays instead of Fridays¹⁹⁹ and according to one *New York Times* correspondent who observed one of their services, followers prayed sitting up on couches instead of prayer mats, they did not take off their shoes, and their mosque lacked a qiblah wall.²⁰⁰ Viewed in this light, it is questionable how much of their differences were based on religious beliefs and how much of their argument was personal. As one of the goals of this thesis is discussing the many forms Islam took in the US during this time period, exploring these rival missions and their differences is worthwhile. The movement's splintering also represents one of the most prominent reasons for its failure beyond American prejudices, as Lant, Nabokoff, and Webb's behavior was off-putting and embarrassing.

Webb attacked both Lant and Nabokoff's characters from the rival mission's outset, claiming that Lant was not really a Muslim, had only joined his staff because he believed rumors that Webb had been supplied with millions of dollars to convert people, and that he eventually

197. "Preaching Islam Here. The Call to Prayer in Union Square. Services at Which Some Features." *New York Tribune* (New York, New York), December 11, 1893: 8. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*

198. "Mahometanism And Woman. Mr. Nabokoff Challenged to Debate. An Unexpected Incident at His Union Square." *New York Tribune* (New York, New York), December 18, 1893: 5.

199. "Preaching Islam Here. The Call to Prayer in Union Square. Services at Which Some Features."

200. "A Fourth Floor Mosque" *The New York Times*, (New York, New York). February 4, 1895: 8

“asked Lant to leave” when their disagreements became too much.²⁰¹ Later, he claimed that he had fired Lant after finding out that he had “served several terms in prison.²⁰²” Lant would later claim that he had left his job, as Webb had underpaid him.²⁰³ He had harsher words for Nabokoff. Nabokoff claimed that he had been Abdullah Quilliam’s²⁰⁴ assistant at the Liverpool Muslim Institute, but Webb claimed that Nabokoff was a charlatan. According to Webb, Nabokoff “ran a candy stand” in New York, loitered around the American Islamic Propaganda, and made a nuisance of himself until Webb asked him to leave, had never met Quilliam, and “had no qualifications for preaching.”²⁰⁵ Lant, for his part, excoriated Webb in his own Islamic publication, *The American Moslem*, often suggesting that his backers in India drop Webb in favor of the First Society.²⁰⁶ This war of words lasted for months, during which time Webb’s former backers did not put their full support behind anyone, and instead urged reconciliation, but it never came, and Lant and Webb continued to trade insults until 1895.²⁰⁷

Although they were not written about as much, Nabokoff and Lant seem to have been just as controversial as Webb if not more so. At their very first meeting, Nabokoff and Lant were reported to have spoken “bitterly” about Christianity, leading Webb to make a public apology on

201. "Scoffed at the Christian Faith Two Preachers of Mohammedanism Give Their Views in Strong Language Called Ministers 'Nuisances'."

202. "Fall of Islam in America" *The New York Times*, (New York: New York). December 1, 1895. 21

203. Ibid

204. Founder of the Liverpool Muslim Institute who claimed to be the first native-born English convert to Islam ("About Abdullah Quilliam" *The Abdullah Quilliam Society* <http://www.abdullahquilliam.org/about-abdullah-quilliam/>)

205. "Scoffed at the Christian Faith Two Preachers of Mohammedanism Give Their Views in Strong Language Called Ministers 'Nuisances'."

206. Singleton, *Brothers at Odds*, 478

207. Ibid, 479

the behalf of “all good Mohammedans.²⁰⁸” They also frequently dealt with interruptions from one Gamaliel Davidyan, and Armenian Christian immigrant who denounced all followers of Islam as “bad people” and demanded that Nabokoff or Lant answer a variety of charges against Islam or else debate him, which Nabokoff always vehemently refused.²⁰⁹ On one occasion, Davidyan demanded to debate Nabokoff claiming he had brought a “converted Mohammedan priest” with him who also wished to ask him a few questions. Nabokoff, who was far more belligerent than Webb, angrily refused to answer any questions or allow discussion as since they were not allowed in Christian churches, they could not be allowed in mosques. He then questioned whether he needed to “send for a policeman,” and demanded that Davidyan not be admitted to his services in the future.²¹⁰ Davidyan then responded by holding his own services in which he endeavored to “expose the truth” of Nabokoff’s teachings shortly after The First Society’s meetings in the same hall they gathered in.²¹¹ This back and forth continued until at least January of 1894, but may have lasted longer. Neither Webb nor Nabokoff was spared these kinds of interruptions, but as Webb typically dismissed people who disagreed with him, whether politely or impolitely, as “not knowing what they were talking about,” he still allowed discussion, Nabokoff went so far as to yell at Davidyan and suggest that he should be arrested for his interruptions. Whether Nabokoff’s belligerence helped or hindered his mission is not entirely

208. "Scoffed at the Christian Faith Two Preachers of Mohammedanism Give Their Views in Strong Language Called Ministers 'Nuisances'."

209. "Mahometanism And Woman. Mr. Nabokoff Challenged to Debate. An Unexpected Incident at His Union Square." *New York Tribune* (New York, New York), December 18, 1893: 5

210. "Islamism in New York Nabokoff Says the Koran Teaches That Women Have Souls, but He Won't Discuss the Question." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 20944, December 25, 1893: 9. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

211. "Discord Enters Islam's Church. Gamaliel Davidyan Interrupts the Services of the First Society." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 8, January 8, 1894: 4. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

clear, although an audience member asked why Davidyan should not be allowed to speak on at least one occasion, so it may have backfired.²¹² Nabokoff's fury may also have indirectly reinforced the stereotype that Muslims were violent and belligerent, providing fuel for Christian missionary perspectives and turning off people who might otherwise have listened.

The quarrel between the American Islamic Propaganda and the First Society for the Study of Islam was embarrassing for all parties involved, and was made worse by press coverage, as the discord and animosity within the two movements made for good reading. Nabakoff, Webb, and Lant's belligerence certainly made it worse, as their public condemnations and petty insults gave the press plenty of ammunition. Perhaps most consequentially, it was disconcerting to their potential financial backers, who did not support either of them during their quarrel. Despite this, the First Society for the Study of Islam was able to continue performing services until December of 1895,²¹³ over a year longer than the American Islamic Propaganda, despite lacking Webb's funding. It is unclear whether they were better at attracting converts, better at keeping the public's interest, or better business people than Webb, but whatever the reason, they appear to have been more successful than him at running a mission.

Legal Quarrel With Mary Nafeesa Keep

Webb's quarrel with Nabokoff and Lant was not the only cause for disharmony in the American Islamic Propaganda. In July of 1894 as Webb tried to rebuild his failing mission and publishing company, disagreements with his editor caused him trouble once again. This time the culprit was Mary Nafeesa Keep, editor of *The Voice of Islam* (a pared down newspaper meant to replace *The Moslem World*) and secretary of the Moslem World Publishing Company. The

212. "Discord Enters Islam's Church. Gamaliel Davidyan Interrupts the Services of the First Society." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 8, January 8, 1894: 4.

213. Singleton, "Brothers at Odds," 483

movement's schism could have destroyed the American Islamic Propaganda on its own, but this incident may have ended all chances of a Turkish bailout and may have indirectly reinforced the stereotype that Muslims were all misogynistic, as Keep happened to be a woman.

On July 14th 1894, *The New York Times* reported that Keep had locked herself into the publishing company's offices and refused to leave or admit Webb or his staff on the grounds that Webb had not paid her salary, wasted his funding on "useless expenditures," and even embezzled funds to buy himself a farm in Ulster Park. Keep told the *New York Times* the following;

I have written to the Turkish minister denouncing Webb. I told him that I hoped that he would not allow the sultan to be imposed upon in the name of the cause of Islam. I propose to remain here until I hear from the Turkish Minister, or until Muhammed Webb resigns his position as president of the American Moslem Brotherhood.²¹⁴

And remain she did for over a week, with a family living above the offices lowering her food through a window.²¹⁵ While this development no doubt infuriated Webb, the New York press and other US publications covered the incident extensively and gleefully, usually taking Keep's side. For example, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* expressed delight that Webb's enterprises were being taken down by a woman. They reported;

According to the moslem faith women have no voice in business affairs, and yet Mohammed Webb finds all his plans circumvented by one of the hated sex...It is sad to think that the work of evangelizing the Western world should be halted by a vulgar question of shekels, and I [sic] that too by a woman. Great is Allah, but Mohammed Webb is evidently not his prophet.²¹⁶

Many publications covered this aspect of the case extensively, which likely reinforced the common stereotype that Muslims were all misogynistic. As the women's rights movement was becoming far more mainstream during the 1890's, this likely turned more people away from the

214. "Muhammed Webb Locked Out" *The New York Times*. (New York: New York), July 14, 1894. 5

215. "Nefeesa Keep Breakfasts" *The New York Times*. (New York: New York) July 16, 1894. 1

216. "A Moslem Defeat." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) 131, no. 15, July 15, 1894: 4.

movement. Keep also brought Webb's character into question by declaring that Webb was a fraud and had only opened the mission to make money,²¹⁷ and showed a journalist at the *New York Times* a circular he had apparently mailed to "Muslims in the Orient" begging for money, although she did not elaborate as to where exactly he sent the circular, if anywhere.²¹⁸ Although Webb's mission was already in financial trouble, this last incident may have ended all chances of a full recovery. Webb had apparently written to Mavroyani Bey, the Turkish Minister to the United States, asking Turkey to fund his mission. When *The New York Tribune* asked the Turkish Vice Consul if they would go through with it, he said that Bey had written him to "say that neither the Sultan nor any officer of his government would touch Mr. Webb's plan with a forty-foot pole."²¹⁹ Whether they would have seriously considered this proposal had Mrs. Keep not taken Webb to task is unclear, but with this incident all possibility of it faded.

On July 25th 1894, Webb arrived at his former offices to remove his belongings and take them to his home in Ulster Park, as the lease on the office was about to expire and Keep had "left the field." *The New York Herald* reported that Webb's gathered staff had planned to reopen the mission once the necessary funds had been collected,²²⁰ but they never were, and Webb would spend the rest of his career as a missionary working from his home. Webb and Keep would continue to fight in the courts for a few more months, with Webb accusing Keep of stealing some of his belongings from the office,²²¹ and Keep attempting to sue Webb and his wife for

217. "Mrs. Keep Speaks Right Out. She Says That Mohammed Webb's Scheme Is A 'Fake'-- The." *New York Tribune* (New York, New York), July 17, 1894: 8

218. "Nefeesa Keep Breakfasts"

219. "Mrs. Keep Speaks Right Out. She Says That Mohammed Webb's Scheme Is A 'Fake'.

220. "Silent is Islam's Voice. No More Will the Muezzin be Heard in the Land till More Funds Are Collected." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 206, July 25, 1894: 11.

221. "The Moslem War Taken to Court." *New York Tribune* (New York, New York), July 26, 1894: 12.

“conspiracy.²²²” There may have been something to Webb’s lawsuit, as Keep returned some of the alleged stolen property to Webb’s lawyers two months after the suit was initially filed,²²³ but if anything came of Keep’s lawsuit, it was not reported in the news.

Both the splinter movements and this incident illustrate the disarray in American Islamic movements during the 1890’s. While the public’s perception of the missions may have been poor due to negative perceptions of Islam and the protests held at the lectures, this type of infighting and squabbling may have been the final nail in the coffin, as it lowered the chances of foreign financial support and was likely off-putting or confusing to more open-minded people who may have otherwise explored the movement, whether or not they converted. Perhaps the lesson to be learned here is that if one chases two rabbits, both will escape.

The Missions’ Last Few Years

Eventually, unspecified “differences in opinion” between Nabokoff and Lant led the First Society to split as well, with Nabokoff controlling the original institution (now called “The International Moslem Union, American Branch and First Society for the Study of Islam”) and Lant controlling a new organization, the American Moslem Institute. For a few months in 1895, three Muslim missions competed for converts in New York City, but Lant and Nabokoff eventually reconciled and joined forces once more under the banner of the International Moslem Union, American Branch, and First Society for the Study of Islam.²²⁴ Despite this, the First Society for the Study of Islam may have been more successful than The American Islamic

222. "She Wants A Warrant for Mohammed Webb." *New York Tribune* (New York, New York), July 27, 1894: 12.

223. "Answered Webb's Summons. Mrs. Keep Delivers up some of the Personal Property He Demands." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 248, September 5, 1894: 7. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

224. Singleton, *Brothers at Odds*, 481

Propaganda in its goal of converting people. As the American Islamic Propaganda closed amid Mary Keep's lawsuit, the First Society was still holding services in an informal mosque.²²⁵ However, falling attendance still led to this mission closing in December of 1895, and only thirty people attended its final meeting.²²⁶ Neither Lant nor Nabakoff attempted missionary work in the United States again and it is unclear whether or not they continued to practice Islam.

In the same month that Nabakoff and Lant's mission closed its doors, the *New York Times* reported that "the Nawab of Basoda" (his proper name was never given) had arrived in the United States to see if Webb's mission had borne fruit. According to the Nawab, Webb had been supplied with £40,000-£50,000, which Webb had squandered. He never spoke with Webb during his visit, but briefly spoke to John Lant, and grudgingly admitted to the *New York Times* that he "could not show a single convert" to Islam in the United States.²²⁷ *The New York Times* interviewed Webb for this article as well. Webb claimed that he had received nowhere near that much money and that, in total, around \$20,000 had been spent on the mission, but that they had earned "a considerable sum of it" through subscriptions. He also told the reporter that, in contrast to Nafeesa Keep's claim, his wife had bought their home with her own money, and that none of his mission's funding had been spent on it. He further lamented that his enterprise was being kept afloat by "a single Moslem in India who knows all the facts."²²⁸ Whether the Nawab's assertion was fair, it was clear that the mass conversion Webb hoped would occur had not happened, and that Webb could not count on his former backers' support in the future.

225. "A Fourth Floor Mosque"

226. Singleton, *Brothers at Odds*, 483

227. "Fall of Islam in America" *The New York Times*, (New York: New York). December 1, 1895.

21

228. *Ibid*

After retiring to his home, Webb continued to publish. He ran a monthly Islamic newspaper, *The Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, from January of 1895 to 1896,²²⁹ and printed two leaflets, *A Few Facts About Turkey* and *The Armenian Troubles and Where the Responsibility Lies*.²³⁰ In stark contrast with his previous publications, which were strictly concerned with Islam, these were pro-Ottoman or pro Abdul Hamid II propaganda, and had nothing to do with the spread of Islam in the United States. *A Few Facts About Turkey* was intended to show English speakers the “wonderful progress made by Turkey under its present Sultan, Abdul Hamid II,²³¹” including improved railways,²³² improvements to Constantinople’s Infrastructure,²³³ and expansion of industry in the form of cotton mills, banks,²³⁴ and public schools.²³⁵ The final section of this leaflet, “The Armenians” concerned the at the time ongoing violence against Armenians in Ottoman territory. Webb places the blame for this strictly on the Armenians, who he claims were the “aggressors” in the conflict,²³⁶ using articles and letters that warned of Armenian “revolutionaries” and “radicals” as evidence of this.²³⁷ This section is also dripping with overt anti-Armenian racism and a dash of anti-Semitism, including one particularly colorful section where he states “according to a well-known proverb in Turkey, it requires six Jews to deceive one Armenian. This proverb shows what estimation Armenians in general are held in the East as to their truthfulness and honesty. The Armenians themselves seem aware of

229. Abd-Allah, 200

230. These leaflets were published anonymously to give them more credibility, but were advertised in *The Moslem World and Voice of Islam* and are widely accepted as Webb’s work. Abd-Allah, 203

231. Alexander Russell Webb, *A Few Facts About Turkey* (New York: J.J. Little) 1895, 3

232. Ibid, 3-7

233. Ibid, 9

234. Ibid, 11-17

235. Ibid, 42

236. Ibid, 57

237. Ibid, 59-61

their deficiency in this respect...²³⁸ and tells the reader that the Armenians' claims of persecution and immigration to the United States was part of a "secret plan" to "use the United States Government against Turkey."²³⁹

The type of racism seen in *A Few Facts About Turkey* makes up the bulk of what is written in *The Armenian Troubles*. He relies on the same letters and articles he used in *A Few Facts About Turkey*, and frequently attacks the Armenians' character, especially when compared to Turks. For example, he says that they were "as a race, much inferior to the Turks. Armenians, even in olden times, showed no greatness, their influence on the world has been absolutely *nil*."²⁴⁰ He suggested that the US should abandon its support for the Armenians as it would "help England in her political aspirations in the East" and was therefore "anti-American,"²⁴¹ and also because the only reason they were supporting them anyway was that the Armenians were Christians and that this was "a bad reason" as "in spite of their Christianity, the Armenians are certainly an inferior and unreliable race."²⁴² Although the racism demonstrated in these leaflets is horrendous, the leaflets themselves do not appear to have much of an influence on US public opinion about Islam or Armenians. I have so far found no press response at all to their publication. They were also published after the mission had closed and as the mission never reopened, it does not appear to have had any influence on perceptions of his movement either. One could almost call the leaflets vanity projects.

238. Ibid, 50

239. Ibid, 65

240. Alexander Webb, *The Armenian Troubles and Where the Responsibility Lies*, (New York: J.J. Little, 1895). 9

241. Ibid, 10

242. Ibid, 18

Why would Webb publish these leaflets at all? Umar F. Abd-Allah suggests that, despite the Turkish Vice Consul's earlier claims, he had received or was receiving Turkish funding, and that this kept his struggling paper alive.²⁴³ Given how poor distribution of *The Moslem World* and *Voice of Islam* were, some sort of outside funding is a compelling explanation for how he was able to keep the paper going for one more year, as Webb does not appear to have taken up other employment. Although Webb claimed that a single Indian Muslim was financing the mission, this could have been a lie he told to hide any Ottoman backing. Webb was also made an honorary Consul to Turkey in 1901,²⁴⁴ possibly as thanks for his favorable writings. The leaflets need not have strictly been the result of a bribe, though; Webb distrusted Christian missionaries on principle because of how they had portrayed Islam, and since so much of the testimony regarding the Hamidian Massacres came from Christian missionaries, he may have, likewise, distrusted it on principle. He could have naively assumed that, since Christian missionaries said it, the direct opposite must be true. Regardless of his reasons, any funding he had received or money he made from these ventures was not enough for his newspaper to turn a profit, and it was discontinued at the beginning of 1896.²⁴⁵

Doomed to Fail?

By the end of 1896, all three New York based Islamic movements had folded, and Mohammed A.R. Webb, Emin Nabakoff, John Lant, and Mary Nafeesa Keep faded out of the public consciousness as quickly as they had arrived. Most were never mentioned in the press again, and details of what happened to them after their missions folded are scarce.

243. Abd-Allah, 203

244. "Given Title by Sultan. Alexander R. Webb, of New York, Made an Honorary Consul General." *Daily Herald* (Biloxi, Mississippi) 4, no. 68, November 5, 1901: [3]. Readex.

245. Abd-Allah, 200

Historians have presented multiple explanations for why Webb’s ambitious movement folded so quickly. Although Webb himself placed some of the blame for his failure on “false American moslems” who “schemed and lied viciously” in order to make a profit,²⁴⁶ he believed it was ultimately his former backers’ fault. In one issue of *The Moselm World and Voice of Islam*, he claimed that they had not provided him with the funding they promised, and that he had managed his business as best he could under these circumstances.²⁴⁷ He placed special blame on his former ally, Hajee Abdullah Arab, who Webb claimed had paid him “\$3,256.99 less than he agreed to furnish the first year.”²⁴⁸ Some historians, such as Emory Tunison, agree with this conclusion, adding that Webb’s poor business practices likely contributed to it.²⁴⁹ Brent Singleton believes that the disunity in the two organizations caused a “substantial setback” in creating a homegrown Muslim community, undermined trust abroad, and was just as destructive to the “indigenous American Muslim’s cause” than any financial troubles could have been.²⁵⁰ Marc Ferris agrees, but adds that ‘few Americans were receptive to Webb’s message.’²⁵¹ Seira Shalton goes a step further than Ferris and Singleton, suggesting that “Islamophobia” and a fear of ostracization caused Webb’s movement to fail.²⁵² These last three suggestions can also be applied to The First Society for the Study of Islam’s failure. All three explanations require some examination.

Unfortunately, Webb’s financial records are not publicly available, nor is documentation of how much his backers sent to him or how he used their money. All we have is Webb’s word,

246. Abd-Allah, 259

247. Abd-Allah, 258

248. Ibid

249. Abd-Allah, 257

250. Singleton, “Brothers at Odds” 484

251. Ibid

252. Ibid

that of his backers, and Mary Keep's allegations. Webb was certainly in financial straits for most of his career, but this could have been due to poor business practices, lack of promised funding, or a little of both. In regards to this explanation, all we can do is speculate.

Much more concrete is the discussion about internal strife surrounding the American Islamic Propaganda and First Society for the Study of Islam. Their leaders' public falling out most certainly harmed both missions, especially the American Islamic Propaganda. The circumstances surrounding the schism at the American Islamic Propaganda were embarrassing to Webb, although Webb's disavowal attracted attention to the newly formed First Society and may have been beneficial to it, at least until it attracted Gamaliel Davidyan. Webb had dealt with outbursts from members of his audience too, though, so this may have been inevitable. The conflict also split Webb's support base, some of which agreed with him and some with Lant, although it is unclear how this affected his funding. On a domestic level, the lack of unity in the early stages of this movement could have easily killed it on its own. The infighting and petty insults so commonly shared with the press were likely off-putting to potential converts or students who might have otherwise bought their work or attended their gatherings. Webb's legal trouble with Mary Keep left him unable to publish as he could not enter their offices, brought his character into question, tied him up in court, and, at least temporarily, ended his chances for receiving Turkish funding, so this may have been the last nail in the coffin for Webb.

The question of Islamophobia and a lack of receptiveness are heavily tied to each other. Webb, Lant, and Nabokoff certainly faced vitriol and anger on the part of audience members and members of the press, which could have negatively impacted his mission. Umar F. Abd-Allah questions whether this could be considered Islamophobia as it is a modern term, and most Americans' negative perceptions of Islam were based on "ignorance and misinformation rather

than a deeply embedded fear or hatred of Islam,²⁵³ but some of that misinformation came from sources which would be considered Islamophobic today, such as the *Omaha World Herald's* suggestion that Webb should leave the country on account of his Muslim faith. It is also worth considering that the fear of ostracization on the part of potential converts would not need to be based in "deep seated hatred." Few people would wish to be understood as unfortunate, backwards, or foolish, although those perspectives were rooted largely in pity, and not hatred. It did not turn everyone away, though, as is evidenced by Webb's staff, which was entirely Muslim.²⁵⁴ Of course, it is an enormous jump to say that not wishing to convert to a religion is in itself a sign of bigotry against that religion, but bigotry could be a factor for some.

There are other, smaller factors as to why the mission could have failed as well. The "Panic of 1893," a depression which caused mass unemployment and would have made people less likely to spend money on unnecessary expenses such as leaflets probably factored into the mission's failure.²⁵⁵ Webb's disdain for Muslims already living in New York, who may have welcomed a formal place to worship, could also have been a factor, although this is pure speculation. It is also possible that Webb's appeal to reason and science instead of emotion was simply not as compelling as he thought it would be. There are a wide variety of reasons why the missions failed, and they likely failed due to a combination of all of these factors, not just one.

So, then we are left with a final question; were the American Islamic Propaganda and First Society for the study of Islam simply doomed to fail from the start? I am inclined to give a

253. Abd-Allah, 261

254. "Silent is Islam's Voice. No More Will the Muezzin be Heard in the Land till More Funds Are Collected."

255. Carlos D. Ramírez, "Bank fragility, "money under the mattress", and long-run growth: US evidence from the "perfect" Panic of 1893", *Journal of Banking & Finance*, Volume 33, Issue 12, 2009, Pages 2185-2198,

cautious no, not necessarily, despite all of the mitigating factors. Webb does appear to have attracted a few converts, as is evidenced by the American Moslem Brotherhood's Quranic study circles, and we should not forget that the Islam Webb, Nabokoff, and Lant preached was adapted for an American audience and that they were preaching during the Third Great Awakening, a time of religious change and exploration in the United States. Under these circumstances, it is not entirely unbelievable that a unified, well-run, and well-funded Muslim movement could have attracted converts. Such a movement may still not have been as successful as more liberal versions of Christianity or the Theosophy movement but a small or moderately-sized, devoted group of followers could have been possible. However, as Webb was a poor businessman, Nabokoff and Lant lacked his funding, and their public personas were off-putting to say the least, they were unable to establish a foothold in New York City.

Although the American Islamic Propaganda could be viewed as a story of what might have been, Webb's legacy lives on in the Mohammed Webb Foundation. This organization was formed in 2004 and continues his work of "creating a space and community that embraces American values in an Islamic context," and integrating "the best of American tradition with the universal teachings of Islam."²⁵⁶ Although Webb had no direct role in its founding, the Webb Foundation's presence could suggest that there was hope of his mission succeeding had it been better funded, or else that Webb was ahead of his time, as whether or not he was accepted during his time, his message is persuasive to some now.

256. "About Us." *The Mohammed Webb Foundation*, 2016. <http://www.webbfound.org/about/> Accessed April 23 2021.

Despite Webb, Nabokoff, and Lant's lack of success at attracting converts, there was still a Muslim population in the late 19th-century United States; the immigrant Muslims that Webb had expressed disinterest in.

Chapter Three

Ordinary Believers; Census Records, Soldiers, and Immigrants

“I was arrested by a guard and taken to the Provost Marshal's HeadQuarters,[sic] where there were a large number of colored men. This guard arrested all black men they met. I was ordered after this to do work in the hospital, taking care of the sick, but I refused to obey, saying that I was a regularly enlisted soldier of the 43d New York, and asked to be sent to my regiment. This I explained to them as well as I could in my broken English but they would not believe me and insisted that I was a n__ger and that the 43d was a white regiment, with no n__gers in it”

- Testimony of Private Mohammed Khan, 43rd New York Infantry Regiment, Co. E, June 13th 1881

In discussing any type of widespread religion or belief system, the lives of the ordinary members are often difficult to cover. When I call the people discussed in this chapter “ordinary,” this does not imply that they were unimportant. It means that they were not famous due to their attempts to spread Islam during their lives. As a result, evidence of their faith is scarce to non-existent. Therefore, this chapter will involve much more speculation than the previous two chapters. Much of this speculation will be based on Quranic names found in census records and military records from this time period. This is similar to the strategy Amir N. Muhammed used in his book *Muslim Veterans of American Wars*. He studied Civil War company records and found evidence of 292 soldiers with Muslim last names,²⁵⁷ a figure which has since been repeated in articles and books.²⁵⁸ I will attempt to use a similar, though slightly less generous,²⁵⁹ strategy in this chapter.

257. Amir N. Muhammed, *Muslim Veterans of American Wars*. (Washington: FreeMan Publications, 2007). 17

258. For example, Jeffrey Lauck’s article “Profile’s on Patriotism,” written for the *Gettysburg Compiler* in 2018, and Edward E. Curtis’s *Encyclopedia of Muslim American History* (New York: Facts on File, 2010). Xxiv

259. Many of the names Muhammed lists as Quranic in his book are potentially misspellings of Quranic names or have many non-religious origins. For example, he lists a “Gotlieb Marmot” as a Muslim soldier (21), as “Marmot” could be a misspelling of “Mahmud,” but it is also a secular French surname. He also does not always make it clear where he has gotten his information from and the book contains no bibliography, so I cannot verify all of the information. As a result, I do not rely on *Muslim Veterans of American Wars* in the section of this chapter that concerns military figures.

This is admittedly a flawed strategy, as it is impossible to know for certain if a person was religious based on their name alone and not everyone who practices a particular religion has an explicitly religious name, but in this case, a flawed method is all that can be had. Census records do not ask about peoples' religious beliefs, and most ordinary people would not have had the opportunity to publicly share their religion in a way which would be present in the historical record. A modern-day researcher might use Pew Research Center data or a similar source, but this organization was not founded yet. Without those options, this type of cursory search is the best option. Having a Quranic name at least suggests a Muslim heritage, which could have impacted their lives even if they did not practice Islam. Nonetheless, ordinary Muslims would have made up the bulk of Muslims in the United States at the time as they do now, and it would be dishonest to study the presence and impact of the religion in the United States without at least attempting to talk about them. This chapter represents an attempt to do just this. It will largely rely on census records, birth records, military records, and newspaper articles from 1870 onwards, as these concern the largest swath of people possible. I should emphasize that this chapter should not be taken as a quantitative study, but rather as a representative sample.

This chapter will attempt to tell the stories of the 19th-Century United States' ordinary Muslims in order to develop at least a vague idea of how they lived and what effect, if any, their faiths had on their social standing in the United States. This can act as a story on its own, or perhaps as a springboard for future scholarship into the subject.

Quranic Names in the 1870 and 1880 Censuses

When studying census records, especially for this time period, it is important to note that the information contained in them is incomplete.²⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the 1870 and 1880 Federal Censuses grant us a glimpse into American Islam in their respective decades. Unfortunately, the historical record in this case very much favors men, and nearly all the records in this section belong to men. This may suggest something about Turkish, Persian, and Indian immigrants at the time. Historically, single men have been more likely to emigrate alone than single women. Sometimes they would change their names, either willingly or at the behest of an immigration officer, and their children would become Americanized, so the family's immigrant background could be lost. In this way, though they are not the countries typically considered when discussing 19th-century immigration to the United States, they followed a very typical pattern of immigration. Limited though they are, these documents demonstrate that Islam was not congregated solely around Webb's mission in New York city, nor was it practiced only by a small group of Webb's followers. Islam in the United States of America was a diverse religion that existed among small numbers of followers from coast to coast, and those followers occupied a wide variety of positions in society. It also suggests that many Muslims living in the United States occupied a place outside of American racial dichotomies at the time. As will be discussed in detail in the Military Figures section, specifically in the cases of Pvt. Mohammed Khan and Hadji Ali, this may have put them in the undesirable position of having different racial identities

260. Census takers miss people in every census, but the 1890 Federal Census was almost completely destroyed in a 1921 fire at the Department of the Interior building. The Census Bureau purposefully destroyed nearly all of the remaining schedules in 1933, as what was left of them was believed to be useless. Any information that could have been gleaned through this census has been lost. See "First in the Path of the Firemen: The Fate of the 1890 Federal Census." Prologue Magazine, *The National Archives and Records Administration*. 2017. <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1996/spring/1890-census-1.html>

conferred on them by different people, with different consequences depending on which identity they were assigned at any particular point.

Though census records are not perfect, they count people of all classes, races, and immigration statuses. This can provide insight into the United States' population as a whole. When looking for information about ordinary people, especially people who were not politically prominent, powerful, or wealthy, it makes sense to start here. This section will examine a select group of people with Quranic names from the 1870 and 1880 Federal Censuses to explore where these people lived, where they came from if they immigrated, what class they tended to occupy, and whether or not their immigrations were permanent.

The 1870 United States Federal Census lists four people with family names which are variations of the name Mohammed. The first is Bernard Mahomet, a 33-year-old Turkish immigrant who lived in Boston Massachusetts. Mahomet's occupation is listed as "laborer," and he lived with 23 other people in what appears to be a boarding house owned by an Irish immigrant named Edward Taylor. The home appears to have catered to working-class immigrants, as 21 of the 23 residents are listed as having a mother and father of foreign birth and only four are listed as being born in a US state, two of which are Taylor's children. All of the residents apart from Taylor's wife, children, and Ann McMowan, Taylor's inferred mother-in-law, worked as domestic servants or as some type of manual laborer.²⁶¹ Most of the census entries for Turkish immigrants at this time list them as "white," but Mahomet bucks this trend and is listed as "Black." He was the only non-white person to live in this boarding house,²⁶² with

261. United States Census Bureau. *1870 United States Federal Census*, Suffolk Massachusetts. 1870. 283-284.

262. As will be discussed further in the Private Mohammed Kahn section, a designation of "Black" did not always mean that the person was of Black African descent, simply that they were dark enough to pass as Black.

most of the others being listed as white and of Irish or Canadian descent.²⁶³ This is the only census in which Mahomet's name appears.

The second name to appear in the census is Raledan Mohammedan, a 35-year-old farm laborer living in San Jose California. Mohamedan's place of birth is listed as Arabia (though a specific country is not listed), and he shared a residence with two Mexican immigrants, Frank and Peter Ojeda, and a Guatemalan immigrant named Charles Smith.²⁶⁴ "Mohammedan" being a word commonly used to refer to Muslims at the time due to English speakers' misunderstanding of Islam, it may not have been Raledan's real surname, but instead a descriptor his housemates applied to him. When the census was taken, "Raledan the Mohammedan" might have been shortened to "Raledan Mohammedan." Like Bernard Mahomet, this is the only census record in which his name appears.

The last two Mohameds to appear in the 1870 Census were two circus performers in Gold Hill, Nevada: 35-year-old "B." Mohamed, and his inferred younger brother, 17-year-old "A." Mohamed. The two of them appear with the other members of the circus they performed in and both were born in Morocco.²⁶⁵ Four other Moroccans, J. Bidet, F. Marrocco (probably a misspelling of Morocco and perhaps not his real name), "Geo." [George] Catta, and A. Kai, also performed in this circus.²⁶⁶ World's fairs, circuses, and sideshows in the United States in Europe have a long history of racism and "othering" people due to their race, appearance, talents, or

263. United States Census Bureau. *1870 United States Federal Census*, Suffolk Massachusetts. 1870. 283-284.

264. United States Census Bureau. *1870 United States Federal Census*, Santa Clara, California. 1870. 67

265. United States Census Bureau. *1870 United States Federal Census*, Story, Nevada 3.

266. Ibid

medical conditions.²⁶⁷ This combined with the United States' appetite for stories about Muslims from the East makes it possible that the Mohamed brothers were specifically hired because of their religion, heritage, or appearance.

The 1880 Federal Census contains a few Quranic names as well. In Wilson, Texas, Mohammed Alley (perhaps a misspelling of "Ali"), a 65-year-old Turkish immigrant who worked as a farmer in Wilson, Texas lived with his wife Sarah Alley, a 56-year-old housekeeper of English descent.²⁶⁸ This couple may also have appeared in the 1860 Federal Census, as the very similarly named Mohammed and Sarah "Alla," a Turkish immigrant and an English one, respectively, lived in San Antonio Texas at the time.²⁶⁹ Mohammed is listed as a merchant in this record and Sarah's occupation, if she had one, is not listed.

Further away from them in San Andreas, California, lived Mahomet Abdallah, a 56-year-old miner from Bombay, India. His record mentions that he was a widower, although no trace of his deceased wife exists in another census so she may have died in India before his arrival.²⁷⁰ Abdallah's name also appears on a California voter registry, dated 1877, though his first name is spelled "Mohammed" and his country of origin is listed as "East India" (at the time a catch all term describing India before the partition and a few neighboring states like Afghanistan). Abdallah became an American citizen on August 6th, 1877, the same day as he registered to

267. Examples include the "hoochie-coochie" dancers and exhibits portraying Native Americans and Africans as "savages" at the Chicago World's Fair, and freak shows and similar acts at amusement parks like Coney Island and circuses

268. United States Census Bureau. *1880 United States Federal Census*. Wilson, Texas. 1880. 17

269. --- *1860 United States Federal Census*. San Antonio, Texas. 1860. 41

270. --- *1880 United States Federal Census, Calaveras, California*, 1880. 20.

vote.²⁷¹ Like Bernard Mahomet, his race was listed as “Black,” even though he was most likely not of Black African descent.

Not all of the apparent Muslims in the census were necessarily immigrants. At least one in the 1880 census may have been a victim of the Atlantic slave trade. A 42-year-old wood chopper named Akdar Abdallah appears in the 1880 Census records for New Orleans, Louisiana. His race is listed as “Black” and his birthplace as “Africa.”²⁷² As it has already been demonstrated that many enslaved Africans were Muslim, Abdallah may have fallen into this category. International slave trading was officially banned in the United States in 1808, thirty years before Abdallah’s birth, but enslaved Africans continued to be smuggled into the United States illegally and sold until at least 1860.²⁷³ If this was in fact Abdallah’s situation, he would likely have been a child or a teenager at the time of his kidnapping. On the other hand, Nicholas Said’s life demonstrates that it was indeed possible for Black Africans to immigrate to the United States willingly, and Akdar Abdallah may have been one of these rare immigrants. His wife, Frances Abdallah, a North Carolinian housekeeper, is also listed in the census.

These records, fragmentary and limited as they are, give us a glimpse into the lives of Muslims in the 19th Century United States. Most of them were male and in working class professions. This is a common story among other groups of immigrants, too. It can also tell us

271. California State Library. *Great Registers, 1866-1898*; California State Library; Sacramento, California; Collection Number: 4-2A; CSL Roll Number: 9; FHL Roll Number: 976456. Digitized by Ancestry.com.

272. United States Census Bureau. *1880 United States Federal Census*, New Orleans, Louisiana. 1880. 3.

273. See Sylviane Diouf’s *Dreams of Africa In Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), which tells the story of the Clotilda, the last known slave ship, which arrived in the United States in 1860, and *Barracoon: The Story of the Last Black Cargo* (New York, Amistad, 2018), by Zora Neale Hurston, which tells the story of Cudjo, a formerly enslaved man brought to the United States on the Clotilda.

about immigrants' migration patterns. There does not appear to have been any particular migration pattern among Muslim immigrants, nor does there appear to have been any particular concentration of them anywhere, but this should not be too surprising. Tempting though it might be to characterize Muslim immigrants as though they were one group, they were divided by nationality, ethnicity, and culture, so they would have little reason to settle down in groups based on religion. This will be discussed in more depth later on in this chapter. The most basic and most important fact that can be gleaned from the census is that there were in fact Muslim immigrants living in the United States in the late 19th century.

Muslim Military Figures and Those With Quranic Names

Although military records present an important glimpse into a cross-section of American society, and they can be especially important in gleaning insights into the lives of ordinary people, the records are limited.

Though there are many recorded 19th-century US soldiers with Quranic names, many of these soldiers' records are limited to carded military service indexes (CMSI). These are catalog cards like those used at a library and tell only the most basic information about a soldier or sailor. Ideally, this includes his first and last name, the rank he enlisted as, the rank he was discharged at, and what regiment and company he served in, but many CMSI are missing some information. These can be used to determine whether a person served and what regiment they served in, but little else. Private Abel Mahomet, of the 11th Maine Infantry regiment, Company

A,²⁷⁴ and Private Moussa Ali of the fifth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery, Company K²⁷⁵ both have carded military service indexes, but no other records of their service. Others, especially Confederates, are limited to unremarkable compiled military service records (CMSR). These records can be very informative, as they contain enlistment records, hospital records, muster out rolls, manumission papers if applicable, miscellaneous papers such as letters relating to the soldier, and most importantly, attendance records, which often include descriptions of any events of note that happened to the soldier during their service; these include promotions, disciplinary actions, and special assignments. However, many CMSR do not contain much information of note and many Confederate CMSR are little better than expanded CMSI. This is the case for Private L. Mahomet, of the first regiment Charleston Guard South Carolina, Company F. His CMSR contains no medical cards or personal papers, only one muster roll which states that he was present from July 10th to September 26th 1863, and enlisted in Charleston, South Carolina.²⁷⁶ Other Quranic names appear in the Numerical Index to Pensions, such as Sulman Abdullah of the United States Coast Artillery Corps,²⁷⁷ and Mahomet Cassin of the Union Navy,²⁷⁸ but no other information is currently available.²⁷⁹

274. War Department, the Adjutant General's Office. "Mahomet, Abel." *Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Maine*. National Archives and Records Administration. NARA ID. 654530

275. ---, "Ali, Moussa." *Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Rhode Island*. NARA ID 654530. National Archives and Records Administration.

276. ---"Mahomet, L." *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of South Carolina*. NARA ID 586967 National Archives and Records Administration.

277. --- "Abdullah, Sulman." *Numerical Index to Pensions, 1860-1934*. Pension Number 1715675.

278. --- "Cassin, Mahomet." *Numerical Index to Pensions, 1860-1934*. Pension Number 5287.

279. This means that both of these men have pensions, which could be very helpful in gleaning information about their lives, especially after their discharge. Unfortunately, they are not

The Federal Census can also tell the stories of military figures. The 1880 Federal Census lists a Private B. A. Mohamed in Rawlins, Wyoming. He was 28 years old in 1880, his place of birth is listed as “Africa,” and he appears to have lived on a military base or hospital in Wyoming, as he shared a residence with many other soldiers whose relation to the head of the household is listed as “Private.”²⁸⁰ In 1880, Victorio’s War was ongoing and several other Native American wars had recently ended, so he had probably enlisted to fight in one of them.²⁸¹ Mohamed’s race is listed as “white,” so he was probably of mixed race or of North African, perhaps Berber, origin, and white passing. All of these soldiers had Quranic names, so they were probably of Muslim heritage, but it is impossible to tell their story beyond that as no further records exist of them.

Even though historical evidence for the previous men is fragmentary and sometimes limited to one short document, this is not the case for the following men, for whom many documents, and in some cases secondary historical sources, exist. I choose to highlight them as their well-documented lives may offer more of a glimpse into the lived experiences of Muslim immigrants to the United States in the 19th century.

Private Ali Ben Moussa, Virginia Light Artillery

It is a well-known fact that the American Civil War is the second deadliest military conflict in the United States’ history in terms of raw casualties, but this does not capture the full scope of its destruction. It is estimated that 2.1 million Northerners and 880,000 Southerners

digitized, and retrieving the physical pensions from the National Archives and Records Administration was impossible at the time this thesis was written due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
280. United States Federal Census. *1880 United States Federal Census, County Carbon, State of Wyoming*. 1880, 34.

281. See Bill Yenne’s *Indian Wars: The Campaign for the American West*. (Pennsylvania, Westholme Publishing 2006)

were mobilized to fight in the Civil War.²⁸² Most of them enlisted and served in the lowest ranks of Private or Seaman depending on their branch. As these were the most common ranks, most Muslim recruits fought in one of them. One such recruit was Private Ali Ben Moussa of the Virginia Light Artillery. According to his compiled service record, Private Moussa was a 33-year-old immigrant from Algiers, Algeria. He enlisted in the Virginia Light Artillery or “Fletcher’s Artillery” on December 28th, 1863. Prior to the war, he had been a French soldier.²⁸³ Strangely, from his enlistment date until March of 1864, Moussa is listed as “absent, sick,²⁸⁴” with an included hospital roll stating that he was at the C.S.A General Hospital in Charlottesville, VA from January 4th until March 25th, 1864 with “acute rheumatism.”²⁸⁵ Apparently, he never returned to his post, as Moussa’s March-April muster roll states that he deserted.²⁸⁶

Moussa’s record raises many questions. Why would the Confederate army recruit a man who was so ill that he was sent to a hospital almost immediately upon enlistment, and why did Moussa desert from the hospital? Was he a bounty jumper? A spy? A coward? It is impossible to tell from just this record. However, a very similar name, “Private Ali Moussa,” appears in a Confederate naval record titled “Miscellaneous Records of Federal Prisoners of War of the United States Navy Who Escaped from Southern Prisons, Deserted to the Rebel Army, Illegally Paroled by the Rebel Authorities, and the Survivors and Perished on the Steamer Sultana, Vol. 1,” on a list titled “Federal Soldiers who joined the Rebel Army.” According to this record,

282. “The Civil War by the Numbers.” *The American Experience*. Public Broadcasting Service. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/death-numbers/>

283. National Archives and Records Administration. “Moussa, Ali” *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia*. NARA ID 586957. 2

284. *Ibid*, 3-4

285. *Ibid*, 6

286. *Ibid*, 5

Moussa and several men listed above him served as sailors on “gunboats ‘Brandywine, Congress, Gen. Perry,’” went on to serve the Confederate army, and had names which “appeared on a list of federal deserters -from archives offices.”²⁸⁷

If we assume that these are the same person, a story begins to emerge about Private Moussa. Moussa immigrated to the United States and, as many immigrants did, enlisted in the Union military, specifically the navy.²⁸⁸ He was then captured as a prisoner of war in December of 1863. Had Moussa been captured just a few months prior he might have been paroled under the Dix-Hill Cartel agreement,²⁸⁹ but this exchange program was abandoned after the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation; from then on, Union and Confederate POWs languished in prisons indefinitely. Confederate prisons were notoriously overcrowded, fetid, and brutal, and Moussa’s illness may have been a result of this. As for what exactly ailed him, Dr. Alfred J. Bollet posits that Civil War soldiers diagnosed with acute rheumatism usually suffered from prolonged rheumatic fever or reactive arthritis.²⁹⁰ Rheumatic fever is caused by strep throat or scarlet fever infections,²⁹¹ and reactive arthritis can be caused by dysentery.²⁹² All three diseases thrive in crowded, unsanitary environments like prisons, so Moussa probably picked up one of these diseases there. Moussa may have agreed to enlist in the Confederacy in order to escape the brutal conditions of the prison and received medical attention for his rheumatism so that he

287. Confederate States War Department. “Alphabetical list of Federal prisoners on the Sultana, including those who survived or perished.” NARA ID: 615651. Digitized by Fold3.com. 119.

288. It is worth noting that I have yet to discover a record for a Union Sailor named Ali Moussa, so I cannot currently verify if this information is correct.

289. Glenn Robins. “Race, Repatriation, and Galvanization.” *Civil War History*, Volume 53, Number 2, June 2007, pp. 117-140. Kent State University Press. 121.

290. A.J. Bollett. (1991), “Rheumatic Diseases Among Civil War Troops. Arthritis & Rheumatism”, 34: 1197-1203. *American College of Rheumatology*. 1198

291. “Rheumatic Fever.” *Mayo Clinic*. 2020 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatic-fever/symptoms-causes/syc-20354588>

292. Bollett., “Rheumatic Diseases Among Civil War Troops. Arthritis & Rheumatism”

would be fit to serve. As he had no loyalty to the Confederacy, he fled as soon as he was well enough to do so, though he does not appear to have returned to the Union navy. What became of him after the war is unknown, as his name does not appear in any census record or any other public record currently discovered. Perhaps he returned to Algeria or used an alias for the rest of his life in order to avoid being punished for desertion.

Hadji Ali (“Hi Jolly”), Camel Driver and Army Scout

The camel driver “Hi Jolly,” who, according to United States folklore, led camels on a voyage through the desert between Arizona and California, was once a popular folk hero in the United States, especially in the West.²⁹³ As a result, many stories about his life exist, but the truth of them is somewhat up for debate by historians. According to his pyramid-shaped monument in Quartzite, Arizona, “Jolly’s” real name was Hadji Ali, but his American colleagues could not pronounce his name properly, so he was referred to as “Hi Jolly.” He arrived in the United States from Syria in 1856 along with another camel driver referred to as “Greek George,” and 33 camels (41 more arrived later). In 1857, the group took part in the “Beale Expedition,” which was an attempt to chart a wagon road from Arizona to California, and though the camels proved useful and the mission successful, their upkeep in the United States was too costly to justify their use, so the camels were sold to circuses or left to fend for themselves in the Arizona desert. He remained in Arizona for thirty years after the experiment, working as an army scout and a miner, until he died at the age of 64.²⁹⁴ This part of Ali’s story is more or less accepted,

293. Michael J Suleiman. “The Arab Community in the United States: A Review and an Assessment of the State of Research and Writing on Arab Americans.” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 37, no. 1, 2010. 46

294. “Hi Jolly.” *Findagrave.com*. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/3063/hi-jolly>

with one addendum; Ali kept many of the camels after he had been officially relieved of duty, and sometimes used them to deliver messages when he worked as a scout.²⁹⁵

Specific details about his life, heritage, and religious faith are the subjects of controversy. Though he arrived in the United States from Syria, and was therefore assumed to be Syrian, Ali also had a Greek name, Philip Teadrow²⁹⁶ or Tedro,²⁹⁷ which was the name he used when he married his wife. So, was he a Syrian man named Ali, a Greek man named Tedro, or perhaps a mixed heritage man with both names? His two names have also brought his religious faith into question. The name “Hadji” is traditionally an honorific name taken by a Muslim man who has taken the Hadj, so a man with that name was almost certainly Muslim, but if his name was really Philip Tedro, we cannot necessarily draw that conclusion.

Which story is the truth? When searching for information about Ali, Jim Kjeelgaard’s children’s book, *Hi Jolly!* is one of the first sources you will come across. This for the most part lighthearted novel portrays Ali as an adventurous Syrian orphan who takes pity on and steals a beautiful red “*dalul* camel” that is mistreated by a group of villainous Druze men. He names the camel “Ben Akbar” and learns to ride and take care of him, as he has always had a fondness for camels. He is then captured by another Druze called “The Jackal,” who presents himself as taking the Hadj to trade with people along the way. While Ali does not approve of this, as he is a Muslim, he goes with The Jackal in order to save his life. Ali completes the Hadj (which allows him to take the name “Hadji”) and learns that The Jackal’s true purpose is to steal the sacred

295. Gary Paul Nahban. “Camel Whisperers: Desert Nomads Crossing Paths. *The Journal of Arizona History*, summer 2008, Vol. 49, No. 2 (summer 2008), pp. 95-118. 110

296. Michael Suleiman. “The Arab Community in the United States: A Review and an Assessment of the State of Research and Writing on Arab Americans.” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, April 2010, Vol. 37, No. 1. Pp. 39-55. 46

297. Jacob Rama Berman. *American Arabesque: Arabs and Islam in the Nineteenth Century Imaginary*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012). xi

Black Stone mounted in the Kaaba. Feeling that he must protect the stone and seeing no alternative, Ali kills The Jackal. Fearing that he himself will be killed, he flees, and meets an American Lieutenant by chance. Seeing that Ali knows how to train and care for camels properly, the Lieutenant asks if he'll "go with him to America," and Ali agrees. He participates in the Beale Expedition, which is successful, but due to a variety of factors Ali does not fully understand, the United States military decides not to use camels.²⁹⁸

This book was published in 1960, decades after the real Hadji Ali died, is dripping with stereotypes about the Middle East, and does not appear to be based on any historical records, so it is not particularly useful when trying to piece together the real Hadji Ali's life. In his about the author section, Kjelgaard said that "Story hunts have led me from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Arctic Circle to Mexico City.... Stories, like gold, are where you find them. You may discover one three thousand miles from home...right on your own doorstep" and remarked that, at the time, he lived in Arizona,²⁹⁹ the same state where Ali lived for the rest of his life and became a folk hero. This novel may be a retelling of the folk stories that Kjelgaard heard "right on his own doorstep" in Arizona, and might be more useful to a folklorist.

Historical records mentioning Ali exist, but they are scarce. A short series of letters between Gen. James Henry Carleton and a clerk for the Union Provost Marshal concerns Ali. The front matter reads "about Express Rider Hadji Ali, citizen," while the end matter reads "Report in relation to Hadji Ali's detention and service", but the letters within have faded, and

298. James Arthur Kjelgaard. *Hi Jolly!* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company.) 1960. Digitized by Project Gutenberg.

299. *Ibid*

are too blurry to read.³⁰⁰ They may relate to his unsuccessful plea for a pension.³⁰¹ The name Hadji Ali also appears in an 1870 military post return from Fort McDowell, Arizona. The return states that Ali was “employed in Q. W. Dept as Packmaster” at the salary of \$100 per month.³⁰² Based on these records, it is questionable whether Ali’s colleagues really misunderstood his name as “Hi Jolly,” and referred to him as such due to their misunderstanding. Clearly some of them understood his name since all of the official records about him use it when referring to him. Perhaps “Hi Jolly” was really a nickname, either given out of affection or to jeer at him, or perhaps his name was only misunderstood after his service.

What to make of his second name, Philip Tedro? The name appears on an 1902 voter registry for Yuma County, Arizona. According to this record, Tedro was born in Greece and naturalized as an American citizen somewhere in Texas on October 6th, 1902, just a few months before he died.³⁰³ This name also appears in his wife, Gertrude Serna Tedro’s, 1936 death record. According to the death record, Gertrude was Phillip Tedro’s widow at the time of her death. There is no mention of a Hadji Ali or a “Hi Jolly” in this record either.³⁰⁴

A few historians have tried to piece together Ali/Tedro’s life from the evidence available. Michael Suleiman believes that he was of Greek ancestry but lived in Greater Syria, and, as a result, Tedro considered himself Arab.³⁰⁵ He also questions whether Tedro was Muslim, and suggests that he took the name “Hadji Ali” not out of religious devotion, but to make his Arab

300. “Union Citizens’ File, Ali, Hadji.” 1861. *National Archives and Records Administration*. NARA ID: 2133278. Digitized by Fold3.com

301. Nabhan, 114

302. “US, Returns from Military Posts, 1806-1916” Fort McDowell, Arizona, 1870. Digitized by Ancestry.com

303. “Great Register of Yuma County, Arizona, 1902.” 97.

304. “Arizona State Board of Health Bureau of Vital Statistics, 1936.” 381.

305. Michael J Suleiman “The Arab Community in the United States: A Review and an Assessment of the State of Research and Writing on Arab Americans.” 47.

heritage apparent to Americans, who “thought all people from the Middle East region were Muslim” and would have found the name “exotic.”³⁰⁶ While Jacob Rama Berman similarly questions whether Ali was Syrian or Greek, he points out that Ali was reported to have raised his children as Muslims, which would suggest that he was one too,³⁰⁷ whether he took the Hadj or not. He also points out that he may have insisted on his Greek heritage and used the name “Philip Tedro” to avoid racist marriage rules, which might have prevented him from marrying his white wife³⁰⁸ (although in some records her race is listed as “Mexican,” so this may not be correct). Gary Paul Nabhan believes that his birth name was Filippou Teodora, and that he grew up not in Syria, but in Smyrna, Turkey, to a Greek mother and a Syrian father.³⁰⁹ Nabhan believes that he was raised Orthodox Christian, but converted to Islam and changed his name to “Hadji Ali” to “commemorate the significance of this Hadj onto his very identity.” This would make Ali the first Syrian Muslim to “make his home and family” in the United States.³¹⁰ He does not directly explain why Ali went by Tedro later in life, but he does assert that, after being denied a pension for his services in 1901 despite the support of “generals, senators, and the governor of the Arizona Territory”³¹¹ on the grounds that he was not a citizen (although he had believed he was one) Ali “belatedly realized that as an Arab immigrant he had never really gained all the rights of citizens born in America.”³¹² Although we cannot ultimately know Ali’s exact religious beliefs or heritage as he never explained them, a combination of Berman and Nabhan’s theories seems

306. Ibid

307. Jacob Rama Berman. *American Arabesque: Arabs and Islam in the Nineteenth Century Imaginary*. (New York: New York University Press) 2012. xi

308. Ibid

309. Gary Paul Nahban. “Camel Whisperers: Desert Nomads Crossing Paths. *The Journal of Arizona History*, summer 2008, Vol. 49, No. 2 (summer 2008), pp. 95-118. 98

310. Ibid, 100

311. Ibid, 114

312. Ibid

the most likely when one considers Ali/Tedro's 1902 voter registration. His use of the name "Hadji Ali" may well have been out of sincere devotion to his religion, but by 1901 he had been denied a pension, and may have realized that he had not gained his full rights in part due to his heritage. In order to gain these rights, he insisted that he was Greek. Greeks were not necessarily considered white, but they were not legally barred from associating with or marrying white people in every state, and they may have been considered closer to white than an Arab man. Although it is worth noting that people considered to be Black could still be naturalized as citizens, as is evidenced by Mohammed Abdullah's voter registration, "Tedro" may have faced fewer obstacles to this than "Ali" would have. This sort of discrimination seems likely when one considers Private Mohammed Kahn's story, discussed later in this chapter.

Sergeant Mohammed Ali Ben/Nicholas Said, 55th Massachusetts Colored Troops

Most of the records discussed in this chapter so far have been government documents without the personal narratives or voice of the person being discussed. This does not have to be true for Sergeant Mohammed Ali Ben Said, also known as Nicholas Said. Unlike the other people mentioned in this chapter, Said wrote an autobiography describing his life and travels (though not his service in the Union Army) which provides a personal account that the other records lack. I hesitate to call him a Muslim Civil War soldier as Said explicitly calls himself a Christian in his autobiography. I include his story in this section nevertheless because he was of Muslim heritage, sections of his autobiography indicate that he may have had a complex religious identity, and because of his prominence. If someone Googles Muslim soldiers in the American Civil War, his name, for better or worse, is one of the first they will find. Some historians do still call Said a Muslim because his initial conversion to Christianity was

undoubtedly under duress.³¹³ Other sources accept Said's conversion to Christianity.³¹⁴ I will attempt to give both arguments as fair a shake as possible in this section. Said's story is also useful in that it can be used to study the lives of educated Black people in the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, and potentially the unique struggles they faced.

Said's autobiography is similar to travel journals written at the time, in that it tells the story of hordes of bandits, people with "primitive" customs, and lands both beautiful and squalid, but united in their strangeness to a Western audience. His incredible story began in Kouka, the capital of the Bornu Empire, circa 1836.³¹⁵ He was born Mohammed Ali Ben Said,³¹⁶ and was the grandson of Katzalla Malagemou, the chief of the nearby country of Mology and the son of Katzalla Barca Gana, described as a "*generalissimo*"³¹⁷ in the king of Bornu's army.³¹⁸ Said is very critical of his homeland. He speaks about his upbringing there with some fondness when he describes the "exuberant crop" the land brought³¹⁹ and of going on "hunts" for "gazelles, pintadas, and other game of which [Bornu's] forests were full,"³²⁰ but most of the first chapter

313. For example, Safet Dabovic's article "OUT OF PLACE: THE TRAVELS OF NICHOLAS SAID." *Criticism* 54, no. 1 (2012): 59-83. Dabovic refers to Said as a Muslim because he was forced to convert.

314. For example, Paul Lovejoy's Article, "Mohammed Ali Nicholas Sa'id: from enslavement to American Civil War veteran." *Millars: Espai i Història*. 219-232. 10.6035/Millars.2017.42.9. 2017, and Patrick Horn's summary of his autobiography ("Patrick Horn, "Summary." Documenting the American South. *University of North Carolina*. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/said/summary.html>)

315. Nicholas Said. *The Autobiography of Nicholas Said: A Native of Bornou, Eastern Soudan, Central Africa*. (Memphis; Shotwell and Co., 1873). 9

316. *Ibid*, 145

317. This is the Italian word for "great General." At the beginning of his memoir, Said apologizes for using foreign words on occasion, and on page vii he says, "pure English cannot be expected of one who has to choose his words and phrases from a mass of Kanouri (my vernacular), Mandra, Arabic, Turkish, Russian, German, Italian, and French." This is not the only time he does this in his memoir.

318. Said, 11

319. *Ibid*, 28

320. *Ibid*, 12

describes various wars, and he laments that he did not see more of his father because he was always fighting in them.³²¹ He also remarks that “oppression was a common thing in my country”³²² and describes a three tiered caste system, with a Kanouri ruling class (of which he was a member), followed consecutively by the Shaub and the Kanembo,³²³ who the Kanouri would often maltreat or steal from.³²⁴

When he was twelve or thirteen years old, Said’s father died at the hands of soldiers from Birgamey, a neighboring, rival kingdom. Shortly after, he and the sons of many other prominent men were sent into the care of a severe but well-educated man named Malam Katory to learn how to read Arabic.³²⁵ During his third year of study with Katory, Said and several other students were captured by a group of “Kindills,” Tuareg slavers, who sold him to a rich man named Abd-El-Kadar, and shortly afterwards they began a long, punishing journey through the desert to Zinder, a “country tributary to Bornou”³²⁶ in what is now Niger. When they arrived at El-Kadar’s estate there, Said faced cruel treatment at the hands of his master and an “Arab servant” named Hassan.³²⁷ As it happened, Abd-El-Kadar had been on an expedition with Katzalla Barca Gana and had respected him, so when Said told him who his father was, Abd-El-Kadar offered to return him to Bornou.³²⁸ Said was not willing to travel through the desert again at that time, and asked to be sold to Turks instead, as he “heard they were very good masters.”³²⁹ Abd-El-Kadar

321. Ibid, 12

322. Ibid, 29

323. Ibid, 22

324. Ibid, 29

325. Ibid, 36

326. Ibid, 45

327. Ibid, 51

328. Ibid, 54

329. Ibid

agreed and sold him to a Turk named Abd-Aga who, sure enough, was kind to him.³³⁰ Said was later sent to Tripoli to be a slave to Abd-Aga's equally kind father, Haji Daoud, and worked in the marketplace there.³³¹ He seems to have enjoyed his time in Tripoli, and was especially complimentary of the Turkish locals, who he described as "generous and hospitable."³³² He went on to travel to Mecca with Daoud, stopping in Cairo, Alexandria, Khartoum, and Domba along the way before finally arriving in Mecca and Medina.³³³ When they returned to Tripoli, Daoud discovered that his store and most of the bazaar had been destroyed in a fire,³³⁴ and in order to financially rebuild after this loss, Daoud sold Said to another man named Faud Pascha, and he was taken to Constantinople.³³⁵

Said spends a considerable portion of his autobiography vividly describing the locals and the landscape at each stop he takes, especially the "filth" and disrepair of places like Constantinople,³³⁶ in contrast to many Western narratives which portrayed these foreign locales as wondrous. He remained in Constantinople until Anatole Mentchikoff, the "Minister Plenipotentiary" of Russia or "Russian Prince" purchased him in secret (as Muslim slaves could not legally be sold out of the Ottoman Empire)³³⁷ and he was sent to Odessa, where Mentchikoff's son taught him Russian.³³⁸ Less than four months later, Russia and Turkey were at war, and Mentchikoff took command of the army in Crimea, leaving Said with his father in St.

330. Ibid, 53

331. Ibid, 67

332. Ibid 68

333. Ibid, 86

334. Ibid, 109

335. Ibid, 112

336. Ibid, 115

337. Ibid, 124

338. Ibid,

Petersburg.³³⁹ Upon arrival, Said was informed that under the Russian free laws, he was not attached to the Russian land and could not be considered a serf, so from that moment on, Said was a free man. Mentchikoff suggested that Said stay with his family anyway, as he promised to get him a good education and send him back to Kouka once he turned 25, but Said found his treatment at the hands of Mentchikoff's other servants so intolerable that he left³⁴⁰ and entered the service of Prince Nicholas Vassilievitch Troubetzkoy.³⁴¹

Up until to this point, Said had continued to practice Islam and said he “rolled his eyes in horror” at the “frequent infractions” of Islamic law that he witnessed, such as the consumption of alcohol and pork.³⁴² Mentchikoff had not seemed to care about Said's religious beliefs, but Troubetzkoy wanted Said to convert to Christianity, and forced him to join him in Christian prayer. Said at first made fun of Troubetzkoy by pantomiming his actions, until Troubetzkoy caught him doing it and beat him for it.³⁴³ Said says “finally, my prejudices gave way, and I consented to embrace the Greek faith, the State religion of Russia.”³⁴⁴ He was baptized “Nicholas” (apparently after Tzar Nicholas I) and would continue to use this name for the rest of his life. This section is the sticking point for scholars who hold that Said remained a Muslim all his life, as it indicates that Said converted to Christianity to avoid Troubetzkoy's abuse, not out of belief in Christ. On the other hand, Said may have grown to believe in Christianity over the course of his life and travels even if his initial conversion was insincere. This is a possible explanation for why he refers to himself as a Christian later on his autobiography.

339. Ibid, 131

340. Ibid, 135

341. Ibid, 136

342. Ibid, 143

343. Ibid, 144

344. Ibid, 145

Following his conversion, “Nicholas” Said travelled throughout Europe with Troubetzkoy and a small group of travelers that went with them in the same way he travelled through Egypt and Turkey with Daoud. Eventually, Troubetzky and Said arrived in London, and Said was overcome with a desire to visit Bornu. Though Troubetzky tried to dissuade him, saying he was “no longer an African, but a citizen of Europe,” Said resolved to go anyway, promising to return to him after one year.³⁴⁵ While waiting for his ship to Malta at a Strangers’ Home at the West India Dock,³⁴⁶ he met a Dutchman named Sanddrost Rochussen, who asked if Said would come with him as a servant during his honeymoon trip through Britain and the United States.³⁴⁷ Said’s desire to see more of the world overruled his desire to return home, and he went with Rochussen and his new wife through Maine, New York, Haiti, and Niagara Falls. He was delighted to meet many Free Black people while in New York.³⁴⁸ These encounters turned out to be especially fortunate for him, as the Rochussens abandoned him at Niagara Falls, leaving behind an unpaid \$200 hotel bill which Said could not afford.³⁴⁹ The hotel seized most of Said’s belongings, including his “four Turkish costumes” and all of his clothing apart from that which he was wearing as payment.³⁵⁰ Penniless and alone, Said turned to an acquaintance of his, a Rev. D. T. Ayelmeyer, who loaned him \$10 and advised him to travel to Detroit, New York, or another city with a large Free Black population, and seek out employment.³⁵¹ After working as a deckhand in Detroit for a short time, he became employed as a French teacher, and decided to

345. Ibid, 185

346. Ibid, 187

347. Ibid

348. Ibid

349. Ibid 199

350. Ibid, 200

351. Ibid

travel south to Charleston, South Carolina, to become a teacher to Black children living there.³⁵² He travelled throughout the South, working as a teacher and then as a lecturer, before settling in Alabama permanently.³⁵³

Most likely because he lived in the former Confederate state of Alabama, Said conspicuously fails to mention his military service in the Union Army anywhere in his autobiography and changes the dates that key events occurred. In his autobiography, he claims that he and the Rochussens arrived in 1867, two years after the Civil War had ended,³⁵⁴ but a passenger list from the *S.S. Bohemia* shows Said and the Rochussens arriving in Maine from Liverpool in January of 1860, a year and a half before the start of the Civil War.³⁵⁵ Had Said admitted to even living in the United States during the Civil War, he would have been expected to comment about it, but by making it appear that he arrived after the Civil War, he could avoid mentioning it and inciting controversy in the process. Fortunately, Said's military records still exist, providing all the evidence necessary to prove that he served. According to one of his CMSRs, he enlisted as a private in the 55th Massachusetts Colored Troops in Reedville, Massachusetts in 1863, and distinguished himself enough to be promoted to the rank of sergeant, though he was later "returned to the ranks" at his own request.³⁵⁶ A second set of carded records elaborates on his service, saying that he was detailed as a clerk in the Adjutant General's office in 1864 (likely due to his demonstrated writing skills), and was then detailed for daily duty at a

352. Ibid, 200-202

353. Ibid, 207

354. Ibid, 197

355. Ancestry.com. *US, Atlantic Ports Passenger Lists, 1820-1873 and 1893-1959* [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2010.

356. War Department, the Adjutant General's Office. "Compiled Military Service Record of Sergeant Nicholas Said, 55th Massachusetts Colored Troops." Publication number M1801. Roll 0012. 3

hospital in Charleston, South Carolina.³⁵⁷ This suggests a different explanation for why Said went to Charleston to teach; perhaps he became acquainted with people there, or became fond of the city while he served there. Though his autobiography makes it sound as though intended to stay in Alabama permanently, his name appears in the 1880 census for Haywood, Tennessee, where he worked as a schoolteacher.³⁵⁸ His name does not appear on any other censuses. I have yet to locate a death record or gravestone, but he is believed to have died in 1882.³⁵⁹

Said is significant due to the uniqueness of his story, but whether or not he could still be considered a Muslim by the time he arrived in the United States is debatable. Of all the aspects of his culture Said describes, he is perhaps the most critical of Islam, saying that prior to Islam's introduction,

Arts and sciences had reached a respectable attitude...[but when] Islam arrived to Central Africa... it brought with it desolation and ruin. Anything like enterprise was rendered impossible, fanaticism and bigotry overruled every thing [sic], and the Mohammed proselytes at once arrayed themselves against every non-follower of the Prophet and his implacable enemies...[any who] had the misfortune to fall into the hands of the Moslems was massacred or reduced into slavery. Cities after cities were razed to the ground.³⁶⁰

Not only does he describe Islam as ruinous, but he also takes great pains to describe Muslims as living in filth, especially when compared to Christians or English people as a general proposition. For example, he says of Alexandria “[it] does not have the appearance of a Mohammedan city, except for in the Mohammedan quarter. Here the streets are narrow and filthy and the houses generally mean; but the Christian quarter, which is next to the bay, is clean,

357. Ibid. 1

358. United States Census Bureau. *1880 United States Federal Census*. Haywood, Tennessee; 1880. 74.

359. “Nicholas Said, 1836-1882.” *Docsouth.org*. University of North Carolina. Accessed Nov. 30, 2020. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/said/summary.html>

360. Said, 15

well-built, and contains a number of fine hotels and merchant's residences."³⁶¹ His description of Smyrna is even more damning. He says "Smyrna, called by the Turks Izmir, presents a splendid appearance to the voyager approaching it from the sea, but on landing it's found, like most Mohammedan towns, to consist of narrow, crooked, filthy streets, and miserable houses, one story high."³⁶² In this way, his writing is similar to that of more sympathetic Christian missionaries. He portrayed non-Christians, including Muslims, as unfortunates who lived in squalor. While he is critical of Islam, he did not hate Muslims as a rule, nor did he take as hard a line in disparaging them as many American Christians, especially missionaries, did. Said respected many Muslims he knew, especially his old, kind master, Hadji Daoud, who he described as "a good Moslem, none better nor more strict in Tripoli."³⁶³ He treats this as though it was one of Daoud's virtues, despite his general criticisms of Islam. Due to Christian Missionaries' beliefs in the moral bankruptcy and corruption of Muslims, this positive portrayal could be considered corrective.

Said's criticism cannot necessarily be taken as an indicator of belief in a particular faith. No matter which religion Said believed in, he criticized his fellow believers. He was generally more complimentary of Christianity, but he did not absolve Christians of all wrongdoing. He comments that the Muslim Turks of Tripoli were prejudiced against Christians, but that "for this...they should not be too severely censured; the Christians considered and treated them as infidels, and they, in turn, looked upon the Christians from a religious point of view as "no better than dogs" (*giour*), and here the matter ended by mutual consent,"³⁶⁴ before emphasizing that he

361. Ibid, 77

362. Ibid, 111

363. Ibid, 71

364. Ibid, 70

was, in faith, a Christian, specifically a Swedenborgian. He claimed that he “want[ed] to see fair play in these matters, let he who is without sin cast the first stone.”³⁶⁵ Judging by this statement, it would be reasonable to conclude that although his initial conversion was under duress, he no longer considered himself a Muslim by the time he wrote his memoir. Whether his conversion to Christianity was due to faith convictions or due to convenience is unclear, though. Being a Muslim would have been difficult for him in Russia and the United States, so converting to Christianity would have come with certain benefits, among them greater acceptance by his peers.

There is a third option that might describe Said’s religious beliefs. Though he may not have considered himself Muslim, he may not have been strictly speaking Christian either. He may have had a dual religious identity like Omar Ibn Said and Edward W. Blyden may have had, or perhaps he, like many Americans, had no particular religious affiliation in practice, but still called himself a Christian out of convenience or for social benefits. His clarification that he was a Christian Swedenborgian is not focused on in writings about him but may be more important in understanding his religious beliefs than previously realized. One of the key tenets of Swedenborgianism is that all religious beliefs originated with the belief in the same god, and it was only through misunderstanding that people came to believe in many different gods. As a result, all religions have some truth to them, and good people of all religions can go to heaven.³⁶⁶ A religious identity that hovered in between Islam and Christianity or was consistent with neither would have been acceptable under Swedenborgian doctrine, and it is possible that he held this kind of belief rather than strictly adhering to one religion or the other.

365. Ibid, 71

366. “The Lord.” *Swedenborg Foundation*. 2020. <https://swedenborg.com/emanuel-swedenborg/explore/lord/>

Nicholas Said's story can also be used to study the lives of educated Black people more generally in the United States. His autobiography occupies a position somewhere in between African slave narratives, like Olaudah Equiano's, and the writings on Black advancement, such as Booker T. Washington's, that gained prominence in the late 19th century. As in the slave narratives, he attempts to correct at least some stereotypes applied to Africa. Said laments that "through prejudice and ignorance, so sadly misrepresented, that anything like industry, intelligence, etc. is believed not to exist among its natives" before describing the "beautiful silk and cotton goods...cutlery, sword-blades, javelins...lances...[and] glass" they manufactured, as well as evidence that "previous to the introduction of Islamism in Soudan arts and sciences had reached a respectable attitude."³⁶⁷ However, he counterproductively concedes that Islam had "rendered anything like enterprise impossible" almost immediately afterward. Essentially, he aimed to correct the perception that Africans are naturally primitive or savage, but in doing so, potentially encouraged the perception that Africans were stifled by their own cultures but could be saved from them, a belief held by many Christian missionaries. This does not appear to have been his aim, as he never suggested mass conversion and criticized Christians, too, and may instead be an emotional response due to his mistreatment at the hands of multiple groups of Muslims.

Said's experiences in Africa laid the foundation for his desire to educate members of his race. Said was an extensively educated man and occupied an at least lower middle-class position as a schoolteacher. His autobiography reflects his position. As was mentioned before, Said's commentary on the ignorance of Muslims is similar to that of Christian missionaries like Edward W. Blyden, who were generally of the middle class or above. As was demonstrated in chapter

367. Said, 14-15

one, Blyden tepidly supported and later embraced Islam, but other Black authors believed Islam was ruinous to Black people and lamented the lack of Christianity among Black people in Africa. Said was much more in the latter camp than the former, though he does not suggest that Christianity could solve all of the problems he observed. When explaining why he chose to settle in Alabama and not in the North where it would have been safer for him, Said says “alas!...It is sadly true that my people here appreciate but slightly the benefits of education. My honest and ardent desire is to render myself useful to my race wherever they may be...I shall always prefer at times to find myself in the midst of the most ignorant of my race and endeavor to teach the rising generation the advantages of education.”³⁶⁸ This commentary on education and industry as tools towards Black advancement is somewhat similar to the rhetoric of Booker T. Washington, William Hooper Council, and before them, Alexander Crummell. Although Said advocates for classical education, Washington, Council, and Crummell were more in favor of industrial education as a means of uplift, though they believed that grade school education and literacy were necessary, too.³⁶⁹ Said never mentions industrial education in his autobiography, so this does not necessarily put him at odds with them.

Said’s stance on African ignorance and the value of education is similar to some of Alexander Crummell’s stances, but with key differences. Crummell wrote favorably about establishing schools for native Africans to correct their perceived ignorance. There, they would be taught English, western values, and the gospel, but unlike Crummell, Said did not advocate

368. Said, 212

369. See William Hooper Council’s “The Negro Laborer: A Word to Him,” Booker T. Washington’s “Industrial Education for the Negro,” (Huntsville, R.F. Dickinson, Job Printer, 1887), and Alexander Crummell’s “Common Sense in Common Schooling: A Sermon” (Washington, DC: s.n., 1896) for the most concise descriptions of their opinions on the matter.

for Christian missionary work or travelling to Africa to “educate” the people there.³⁷⁰ Not to mention, he said that his desire to educate the “most ignorant of his race” brought him to Alabama, suggesting that the most ignorant people were in fact in the United States, whereas Black Africans were usually portrayed as the most ignorant people by both Black and white speakers alike.

Said’s life was in one sense like William Hooper Council’s. Both of them worked as school teachers at all-Black schools in Alabama, where, according to biographer William J. Simmons, Council faced “many and severe difficulties” with the Alabama Ku Klux Klan.³⁷¹ Said also mentions that, before moving to Alabama, the Black people he met in Georgia and Florida warned him that “Alabama was a very dangerous state and filled with Ku Klux, and that the freedmen there did not know what freedom was owing to the oppression of the whites under which they were situated,”³⁷² which is a similar sentiment to Washington’s statement that “It has been necessary for the Negro to learn the difference between being worked and working.”³⁷³ This not only provides another reason for Said’s embrace of Christianity, as most of the people he served and associated with would have been Christian, but it also shines a light on how Said may have lived his life in the United States. He never mentions having been harmed by the Klan or other racist people, but as an educated Black professional, he may have been at an increased risk of attack. Author and activist Ida B. Wells explained the history of lynching in her book *The*

370. See Alexander Crummell. *The Future of Africa: Being Addresses, Sermons, etc., etc., Delivered in the Republic of Liberia*. (New York: C. Scribner, 1862.)

371 Simmons, William J., Turner, Henry McNeal. *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising. United States:* (G. M. Rewell & Company, 1887.) 392

372. Said, 205

373. Booker T Washington, et al. *The Negro Problem*. Project Gutenberg, 2005.

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15041/15041-h/15041-h.htm#Industrial_Education_for_the_Negro

Red Record. She explained that the Klan oppressed Black people, most violently through lynching, for fear of “Negro Domination,” and many of the case studies she includes involved prominent or successful Black men within the communities they were lynched in.³⁷⁴ The Klan’s desire to prove white supremacy and the fear they felt towards successful Black people were their true motivations, with most charges lobbied against the victims being excuses for their hatred and violence. This does not explain Said’s move to Tennessee though, especially since Tennessee was the birthplace of the Klan and his life would have been no easier there. Perhaps he moved to Tennessee because he believed that his services were more needed there, or that he had accomplished his purpose in Alabama and wanted to spread education elsewhere.

Said’s views on education are most in line with those of W.E.B Du Bois (1868-1963), although Du Bois did not publish anything until long after Said’s death. Although he never discusses higher education, Said certainly believed in the value of basic education and at least some more advanced classical education for Black students, as is evidenced by his work as a French teacher. Du Bois expresses similar beliefs in his 1903 collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*. In chapter four, “Of the Meaning of Progress,” Du Bois tells the tale of his time as a schoolteacher in Tennessee. He expressed joy at the inquisitiveness, drive, and charm of many of his students, especially those “to whom War, Hell and Slavery were but tales of childhood.”³⁷⁵ These students longed to advance and move beyond the “World” of their little town, but were stymied by barriers such as “caste...youth [and] life.”³⁷⁶ Just as some people in Said’s

374. Wells, Ida B. *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States*. Project Gutenberg, 2005. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14977/14977-h/14977-h.htm>

375. W.E.B Du Bois. “Of the Meaning of Progress,” In *the Souls of Black Folk*. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co. 1909). 68

376. *Ibid*

community did not appreciate the value of education, Du Bois describes the Lawrence family, whose children were enrolled at the school but stopped coming because the “old folks” had expressed doubts about the value of “book learning.”³⁷⁷ While Said’s tone is open ended but optimistic, Du Bois’s tale has a much sadder ending. He left the school after two summers, and when he returned to the town years later a new and improved schoolhouse had been built. He found that some of his former students and neighbors were doing well, but many had died or fallen into poverty, and few had advanced beyond the situation he had found them in.³⁷⁸ He was especially grieved to find that Josie, a kind, hardworking young woman he had been especially fond of, had worked herself to the bone in order to support her siblings (who had foolishly ended up pregnant or in jail while she toiled without complaint) and died, sad and tired, in the town he taught her in.³⁷⁹ Education would certainly not solve all of the problems facing the people he had met, but it was necessary and beneficial. Though Said did not make much comment on civil rights in his autobiography, on this point he and Du Bois are certainly in agreement.

It is a shame that he never wrote a sequel to his autobiography about his life in the United States. Unfortunately, the last record of Nicholas Said is the lone page from the 1880 Federal Census, and it is unclear where life took him after this.

Private Mohammed Kahn, Alias John Ammahai³⁸⁰, 43rd New York Infantry Regiment

Ordinary people often only become historical figures due to great misfortune. Such is the case

377. Ibid, 65

378. Ibid

379. Ibid, 69-70

380. War Department, Adjutant General’s Office. “Approved Pension File of Private Mohammed Kahn (alias John Ammahail), Company E, 43rd New York Infantry Regiment (SC-193744).” *National Archives and Records Administration*.

for Private Mohammed Kahn of the 43rd New York Infantry Regiment.³⁸¹ Were it not for his illnesses, his wrongful arrest as a contraband of war, and the large number of documents his arduous pension and legal cases created, Pvt. Kahn's fascinating story would probably have been lost to history. His unusually extensive Civil War pension record has been digitized by the National Archives and Records Administration and tells one of the most expansive 19th-century Muslim immigrant stories available. His life's story has implications for studying the lives of other Muslims, and indeed all ethnically ambiguous people, during this time period.

According to the statements he gave in his pension hearings, Private Kahn was born in Afghanistan, but raised in Persia, and immigrated to the United States in 1861 with what he described as an "American officer consul, or something like that."³⁸² It is likely that Kahn was referring to one of the diplomats Congress authorized to travel to Persia. As was true for many immigrants, Kahn was left to his own devices upon arrival in the United States. Complicating his life further, Kahn did not speak English, and unlike German or Italian immigrants, who were likely to meet others from their countries of origin, Kahn did not meet anyone else who shared his heritage or native tongue. Kahn was, in every sense, alone. He said that he sold beadwork on the streets to make a living, but did not elaborate on where, if anywhere, he stayed. If he was unaware that his new country of residence was at war before he arrived, he would have learned of it very quickly. Over 50,000 men from Connecticut fought in the Civil War,³⁸³ and large cities like Hartford and New Haven crawled with recruiters and people looking for work. Alone in an unfamiliar city, Kahn may have used local taverns as his living room and learned a bit of English

381. Although "Khan" would probably be the spelling used today, I use "Kahn" in this section as it is how he is referred to in all of his records.

382. *Ibid*, 2

383. "MEN OF CONNECTICUT! TO ARMS!!!" "Military Images" 33, no. 2 (2015): 24. Digitized by JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24864378>.

through the ramblings of the patrons. Two months after his arrival in the United States, two unfamiliar people wearing the colors of the Union army entered the tavern. One of them was Francis Turner, a second Lieutenant in the 43rd New York Infantry Regiment, who persuaded Kahn and a few other intoxicated bar flies to enlist in the Union Army. While Kahn did not give a reason for enlisting other than “I was persuaded to enlist while under the influence of liquor,”³⁸⁴ He had many other potential motivations for enlistment. As a transient with an unsteady source of income, the prospect of shelter and steady wages might have been appealing to him, as it was for many other immigrants.

Whatever his motivations, Kahn enlisted on August 9th, 1861 under the alias John Ammahaie, apparently a 31-year-old hunter from Charleston, South Carolina.³⁸⁵ Though Kahn never explained why he took this alias or assumed a false identity, doing so was not an especially uncommon occurrence, especially among immigrant soldiers. This could be for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, a soldier enlisted under their birth name, but later anglicized their name and became known in their civilian life by this anglicized name. Their birth name could then be listed as an alias, as was the case for Private Andrew A. Egge, born Anders Anderson, a Norwegian immigrant who served in the 12th Iowa Infantry Regiment, Company G.³⁸⁶ They may also have enlisted under the name of a relative who already lived in the United States, as Private Frank Spietaler, alias Francis F. Rupert of the 43rd New York Infantry Regiment, did. His cousin, James

384. “Approved Pension File of Private Mohammed Kahn” 2

385. War Department, the Adjutant General’s Office. “Compiled Military Service Record of Private John Amanaha, Companies A, E, and H, 43rd New York Infantry Regiment.” *National Archives and Records Administration*. 39.

386. War Department, the Adjutant General’s Office. “Approved Pension File for Private Andrew A. Egge (Alias Anders Anderson), Company G, 12th Iowa Infantry Regiment (SC-857264)” *National Archives and Records Administration*.

Ruppert, was a wealthy brewer in New York.³⁸⁷ Kahn's situation was similar to Egge's. He enlisted under a false name, but over the course of his pension hearings, it became necessary for the board to know his birth name, so "John Ammahai" or "Ammahail" became his alias. This name and southern identity would seem an odd choice, though. A newspaper article written after Kahn's death suggested that his recruiter believed Kahn was Blackfoot Native American and chose the name John Ammahoe for him as "Ammahoe" was a Blackfoot word.³⁸⁸ This is unconfirmed, but since his skin was brown and he apparently wore his hair long, many witnesses to his pension hearing testified that they believed he was Native American, or partially Black and partially Native American. Since Native Americans were allowed to serve in some white regiments at the discretion of commanding officers,³⁸⁹ but Black men were not, his enlistment as a Native American seems probable. It might also explain why his former profession was listed as "hunter" in his Compiled Military Service Record, as this is a stereotypical profession for a Native American man. Whatever the reason, he enlisted, and travelled to New York to meet the rest of his regiment shortly afterwards.

During his service, Kahn served as a sharpshooter but was occasionally detailed as a company cook by his superior officers.³⁹⁰ He enlisted in Company H, but was transferred to Company E on July 18th, 1862.³⁹¹ Among other battles, he fought at Antietam, Malvern Hill, Salem Heights, and White Oak Swamp. Injuries received in these battles, among them a broken

387. --- "Approved Pension File for Private Frank Spietaler (Alias Francis F. Rupert), Company D, 43rd New York Infantry Regiment (C-2508352)." National Archives and Records Administration.

388. "Mohammed Kahn, Pensioner." *Daily Tobacco Leaf Chronicle*. (Clarksville: Tennessee) August 7th, 1891

389. "We Are All Americans, Native Americans in the Civil War." *City of Alexandria, VA*. <https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/fortward/default.aspx?id=40164> 2017.

390. Pension, Kahn, 3-6

391. CMSR, John Amanaha, 35

arm and blunt force trauma to the left side of the face (caused by a Confederate soldier or southern sympathizer striking him with an unloaded musket) formed the basis for his original pension application. For the beginning of his service, Kahn appears to have been a perfectly ordinary Union enlisted man, with no significant commendations or reprimands listed in his record. This changed in May of 1863.

After the Battle of Salem Heights, Kahn was detailed as a company cook by then Second Lieutenant (later Captain) William Russell. Russell later sent him on an errand to return money to a sutler at the Brigade Headquarters in Frederick, Maryland shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg. From May to July of 1863, Private “Ammahaie” is listed as “absent, Brig. Head. Qrts.” in his CMSR. In August of the same year, the status changed to “deserted.”³⁹² This was a logical conclusion as he had not returned to his post in months, but was inaccurate. In truth, he had been arrested as a contraband of war (an enslaved person who escaped to Union lines and was allowed to stay there in exchange for labor) by officers of the provost marshal’s headquarters in Hagerstown, Maryland, where he and several other arrested Black men (who according to Kahn were just “in the area,” not necessarily fleeing enslavement) were forced to work in a Union hospital. Kahn testified that he showed the men his corps badge and tried to explain that he was, in fact, a regularly enlisted soldier in his heavily accented and limited English, but that they did not believe him, as the 43rd New York was a white regiment and they believed Kahn was Black.³⁹³ He would not officially return to the 43rd New York until March of

392. Ibid, 39

393. Pension, Kahn, 5

1865, when he is listed as “returned from desertion under the president’s proclamation of March 11th 1865.”³⁹⁴ Kahn gave two explanations for why this happened.

On May 5th, 1876, Kahn testified before the House Committee on Military Affairs regarding his bounty account. One of the remaining consequences for deserting, even if the soldier or sailor returned to their post, was that they would not be able to claim the bounty promised to them at the start of their service. Kahn claimed that his abandonment of his post was not his fault, as he had been arrested while attempting to return, and he should therefore be paid his bounty. In this account, he was taken to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania with a squad of other contrabands, but fled to Philadelphia in the hopes of finding transportation. Unfortunately, he could not find anyone who believed that he was really a soldier, and as a result, no one would transport him back to his regiment. Without the money to buy transportation on his own, he enlisted in the first Connecticut Heavy Artillery, and rejoined the 43rd New York in September of 1865 when the two regiments met by chance.³⁹⁵ Two of his colleagues in the 43rd New York, Captain E.B. Goodyear and quartermaster Miles Goodyear, testified to knowing about his arrest during their service, and Sergeant Edward Chipman of the First Connecticut Heavy Artillery

394. This refers to Abraham Lincoln’s 1865 presidential proclamation, “Proclamation 124- Offering Pardons to Deserters.” This declared that all Union deserters who did not return to their posts or report themselves to the provost marshal’s headquarters within sixty days of the proclamation’s issuance would be understood to have “voluntarily relinquished and forfeited their rights of citizenship and their rights to become citizens, and such deserters shall be forever incapable of holding any office of trust or profit under the United States or of exercising any rights of citizens thereof.” Kahn returned to his post that same month. (Abraham Lincoln, Proclamation 124- Offering Pardons to Deserters. *The American Presidency Project*. UC Santa Barbara. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-124-offering-pardon-deserters>)

395. House of Representatives. “Index to the Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives for the First Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress, 1875-’76, Report No. 483” (Washington: 1876) Google Books. 1

testified to knowing “John Ammahaie” while he served in that regiment.³⁹⁶ In light of this evidence, the government accepted his story and paid Kahn his bounty.³⁹⁷ The transcript of a letter from the War Department, Adjutant General’s office, dated March 16th 1875 is included in his CMSR. This letter reads;

The charge of desertion and the penalties attaching to his having been reported as having returned under the President’s Proclamation are removed. He was detailed with the Brigade Quartermaster and while so detailed was arrested as a contraband (being an East Indian and of a dark complexion [sic]) and sent to Harrisburg with a squad of contrabands. Unable to procure and without means to pay for transportation back to his regiment, he hired out as a servant to the Captain of the 4th Connt.³⁹⁸ [Connecticut] Heavy Artillery where he remained until the two commands came together when he rejoined his Regt.”³⁹⁹

Kahn stuck to this story for five years, but in 1881, he told a different, much more harrowing tale to Special Agent Leonard Martin, the agent assigned to his pension case.

As in the accepted story, he was arrested as a contraband in Hagerstown, forced to travel to Harrisburg, fled to Philadelphia, and ended up marooned there, but from this point on, the story changes. In this version of events, Kahn stayed in Philadelphia for many months. During this time, he lived on the streets and begged in order to survive.⁴⁰⁰ He somehow heard that his regiment was fighting at the Battle of the Wilderness and encountered the “14th Brooklyn” (probably the 14th New York Infantry Regiment) as they were about to board a train to the front lines. “As I was very anxious to join my company” Kahn explained, “I jumped aboard this train

396. Ibid, 2

397. House of Representatives “An act directing the Second Auditor to settle the pay and bounty account of John Ammahaie or Ammahe.” In the Statutes at Large of the United States of America from December, 1875, to March, 1877: Statute II, 1876-’77. Page 500

398. This is a mistake. There was no 4th Connecticut Heavy Artillery. There was a 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery which was raised from the 4th Connecticut Infantry Regiment. Kahn amalgamated the two in his testimony and the War Department did not correct it in the record.

399. Amanaha, CMSR (1)

400. Pension, Kahn, 6

just as it started and went with it, without asking permission of anyone to get aboard.” They disembarked from the train in Washington, DC, and marched the rest of the way to the front lines, where Kahn encountered two of his colleagues, “Schultz” and “Haldebrand.” After explaining himself to his colleagues, he armed himself and fell into position.⁴⁰¹ One of the Lieutenants witnessed his return and commented “hello Ammahai, have we got you back?” Before returning to his position. Kahn then participated in the last day of fighting but was shot in the left hand early in the day. No longer able to hold his gun properly, he retreated, and was sent to a hospital in Fredericksburg before being transferred. He was first sent to Columbia College Hospital, and then to Chestnut Hill Hospital, where he was treated along with several other men from his regiment, including a “John Blackstock” and a “Pat Casey.” According to Kahn, the head doctor there, “Dr. Moore,” only knew him as “John” and did not know his surname.”⁴⁰² After three or four months in this hospital, he was given a thirty-day furlough, but Kahn mistook this for a discharge order due to his still limited English. Needing employment, he hired out to the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery,⁴⁰³ and the situation was not resolved until 1865 until, as in his original story, the two regiments met by chance. Exasperated by Kahn’s changing testimony, Leonard Martin wrote the Commissioner on Pensions in regard to his case. The letter in part reads,

He [Private Kahn] is shrewd and has any amount of cheek, and has no doubt rehearsed a great many times to Congressmen & others the story he told me. He is well posted as to War measures, especially connected with the Army of the Potomac and with his seeming intelligence it appears marvelous that he found it impossible to get back to his regiment from Phil., as he states, & seems more marvelous that he should have returned in just the way he did, arriving in the nick of time to be conveniently wounded in the hand. His story seems very thin to me.⁴⁰⁴

401. Ibid, 7

402. Ibid, 8-9

403. Ibid, 9

404. Ibid, 105-106

“Thin” and “marvelous” as the story was, could it have been true?

If he did incur this wound while in the service, it was most likely not at the Battle of the Wilderness, as he originally claimed. This conflict only lasted for three days, and Kahn testified that it took him at least three days to arrive at the battle. More likely, he was shot at the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, which was a continuation of the Union overland campaign which began with the Battle of the Wilderness. Kahn’s CMSR lists him as “deserted” until 1865, with no mention of his presence at either battle, and no records of Kahn’s purported treatment for a gunshot wound at Chestnut Hill Hospital exist. In fact, according to the War Department there was no record of anyone from the 43rd New York Infantry Regiment being treated at Chestnut Hill Hospital.⁴⁰⁵ To put it simply, there is no documentary evidence to suggest that Kahn was present at either battle.

Despite this lack of evidence, medical records included in his pension file do note that Kahn had a small scar on his left hand consistent with having been shot by a “buckshot or small ball,” so he was shot at some point.⁴⁰⁶ Dr. William Moon, who worked at Chestnut Hill Hospital, testified to having treated Kahn there, not for a gunshot wound, but for rheumatism.⁴⁰⁷ This suggests poor bookkeeping at the hospital, and if the doctor really only knew Pvt. Kahn as “John,” there may not have been a record kept. The names of at least three of the soldiers Kahn named in this testimony appear on the company roster. Sergeant John Blackstock enlisted in Kahn’s company around the same time he did.⁴⁰⁸ “Schultz” most likely refers to Private Charles Schultz. Interestingly, he was wounded in action on the same day Kahn claimed he was, though

405. Ibid

406. Ibid, 57

407. Ibid, 56

408. “Annual Report for the Adjutant General, State of New York, For the Year 1898.” (New York: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co.) 1899. 1115

Kahn did not testify to seeing him at the hospital.⁴⁰⁹ No one named “Haldebrand” served in the 43rd New York Infantry regiment, but the similarly named First Sergeant William Hillibrant (sometimes borne out as “Hilderbrandt” or “Hilderbrand”), was in his regiment.⁴¹⁰ All four soldiers enlisted in August of 1861 and fought in Company E, so it seems likely that they knew each other. No “Pat Casey” or Patrick Casey appears in the company roster, but the names Daniel Casey, Edward Casey, and John Casey do, so perhaps he was referring to one of them.⁴¹¹ An obvious question remains when considering this story; if Kahn was trying to fool the pension officials into raising his pension and he really had been shot at some point, why would he make up a lie this elaborate and difficult to believe? Why not say that he had been shot at a battle he was confirmed to have served at? On the other hand, why did he not tell the House of Representatives the full story rather than the pared down version they accepted? If the second story was the truth, then technically speaking, the first, less complicated testimony is not a lie, but he omits a large chunk of the story. His lawyer may have coached him to do this for fear that Congress would not believe the complicated story or because he did not believe it was necessary. It is also, of course, possible that the second story was fraudulent, or that the entire story was fraudulent, and Kahn really did desert his post in 1863. If he did, he was far from alone. Desertion was a major problem for the Union and Confederate armies throughout the Civil War, as the pressures of battle, camp life, and above all fear and homesickness often became too much for the men to bear. I am inclined to believe that Kahn did not desert his post, and that at least the first version of the story is true because it was investigated and accepted. No effort appears to have been made to verify the second version of the story, even though Schultz, Hillibrant,

409. Ibid, 1309

410. Ibid, 1205

411. Ibid, 1132

Blackstock, or Casey's testimony might have solved the whole mystery. Instead, it appears to have been immediately dismissed regardless of its accuracy, and Kahn was never asked about it again. I will give Private Kahn the benefit of the doubt and say that this story might be true, but I will not declare that it was true as it was not investigated. Since all parties involved are now dead, there is no way to conclusively verify it now.

Regardless of what happened after the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, Kahn returned to his company in March of 1865 and worked as a sharpshooter again. In May of that year, he grew very ill with rheumatism,⁴¹² which his doctor believed was caused by "exposure,"⁴¹³ and was off duty recovering from his illness for about a month.⁴¹⁴ He mustered out with his company at the end of the war, and lived a fraught civilian life. By the end of the war, his wife had also emigrated from Persia, and they lived together in Boston, where they sold beadwork for a living. They lived there for eight years and had two children together, but his wife died when the eldest of them was two years old.⁴¹⁵ He remarried Minerva Kinney, a mixed-race woman from Charlottesville, VA, a few months after his first wife passed away, but they separated a few years later.⁴¹⁶ Their separation may have been due to Private Kahn's worsening health. His rheumatism grew worse as he grew older,⁴¹⁷ and he developed several other medical conditions, such as an enlarged heart, a "scalp disease" (probably plaque psoriasis), and an anal fistula, all of which, Kahn alleged, eventually made it impossible for him to support himself through manual labor.⁴¹⁸ These conditions were probably made worse by his alcoholism. Leonard Martin described him as

412. Approved Pension, Mohammed Kahn 11

413. Ibid, 92

414. CMSR of Pvt. John Amanaha, 19

415. Approved Pension, Mohammed Kahn 12

416. Ibid, 13

417. Ibid, 166

418. Ibid, 60

“of good character, though somewhat addicted to drink,”⁴¹⁹ he enlisted in the Union Army while drunk, and he came to at least one pension hearing and one medical examination drunk,⁴²⁰ all of which suggest unhealthy drinking habits. His addiction appears to have reached a head in 1886 when according to the *Alexandria Gazette*, Kahn tried to break into one James Bird’s house while intoxicated. The two argued, and Kahn fell down a flight of stairs and broke his leg, either by accident or because Bird shoved him. Bird was initially arrested for assault but was released.⁴²¹ Kahn’s conditions grew disabling enough that by 1882, he was living in the National Soldiers’ Home in Hampton, Virginia, and transferred between this home and a similar home in Togus, Maine for the rest of his life.

Between his marital troubles and increasing health problems, Kahn spent the rest of his days arguing that his pension should be increased as his disability was growing worse. He believed he was completely incapacitated from performing manual labor nearly equal to the loss of one hand or one foot,⁴²² which would have entitled him to an \$18 pension under the 1873 Act *An Act to Revise, Consolidate, and Amend the Laws Relating to Pensions*,⁴²³ but the most Kahn ever earned was \$14. He was extremely persistent in his efforts and wrote (or perhaps dictated) a letter to the Commissioner on Pensions in 1883, asking that he look into his case,⁴²⁴ and to the Secretary of the Interior in an undated letter.⁴²⁵ In both letters he states that his pension claim

419. Ibid, 1-4

420. Ibid 13

421. “Broke His Leg” *Alexandria Gazette*. (Richmond, Virginia), 1886. 3

422. Approved Pension File, Mohammed Kahn, 155

423. House of Representatives. “An Act to Revise, Consolidate, and Amend the Laws Relating to Pensions.” In Public Acts of the Forty-Second Congress of the United States. Session Three, Chapter 234, page 569 <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/42nd-congress/session-3/c42s3ch234.pdf>

424. Approved Pension File, Mohammed Kahn 144-145

425. Ibid, 76

was just, but had been denied due to his ignorance of the English language. His case made it to the House Committee on Pensions at least three times, and on each occasion it was indefinitely suspended and no ruling was ever handed down.⁴²⁶ He gained enough notoriety that his pension case was reported on at least once during his life when in 1881, the Minnesota based newspaper *The Warren Sheaf* published a short article which claimed that Kahn wanted \$50,000 from the government (although the most he ever asked for was \$24, the amount provided to a soldier who had lost a hand *and* a foot), erroneously identified Kahn as “a native of Bombay” who was wounded at Gettysburg, and disparaged him as a “wily Mohammedan.”⁴²⁷

There are a variety of reasons why Kahn’s claims may not have been taken more seriously. First, his alcoholism caused him to be an unreliable witness, and he admitted to making mistakes in his testimony as a result of his drunkenness.⁴²⁸ There is also some evidence to suggest that Kahn was mentally ill. Dr. William B. Mackie testified to treating Kahn for “rheumatism and nervous exhaustion,” now typically referred to as a nervous breakdown, while in the service.⁴²⁹ Dr. George Steven Jones, who knew Kahn while he lived in Boston and bought items from his beadwork store, believed he was a “monomaniac” or of “unbalanced mind,” and described Kahn’s behavior as “at times very strange.”⁴³⁰ This raises the question about whether or not Kahn’s service in some way caused this strange behavior. In *Shook Over Hell*, historian Eric T. Dean suggests that post-traumatic stress disorder, alcoholism, and drug abuse by Civil

426. United States Senate “List of the Private Claims Brought before the Senate of the United States from the Commencement of the Forty-Seventh Congress to the Close of the Fifty-First Congress.: Prepared under the direction of the Secretary of the Senate, pursuant to a resolution of the Senate of September 30, 1890.: August 14, 1894 - ordered to be printed.: In three volumes. Volume II.” 332 The Hathi Trust.

427. “News from Washington.” *The Warren Sheaf*. (Marshall Co. Minnesota). Feb 26, 1881. 2

428. Approved Pension File, Mohammed Kahn, 13

429. *Ibid*, 92

430. *Ibid*, 28

War soldiers were more common than is usually imagined, and though it is impossible to know for certain, it is possible that Kahn was affected by this.⁴³¹ No matter the cause, this would also have rendered Kahn an unreliable witness, too. Perhaps most importantly, whether or not a disability was pensionable depended on whether or not a condition had been caused or exacerbated by “vicious habits.” Judging by Kahn’s testimony⁴³² and that of some of the witnesses, he was suspected of having syphilis, which could also cause rheumatism. Doctors examined Kahn and never testified to seeing any evidence of syphilis nor any evidence that his illnesses were caused or aggravated by vicious habits,⁴³³ but the suspicion that he might have had latent syphilis could have affected their judgements in his case.

Racism or prejudice may also have factored into their decisions of course, although there is not explicit textual evidence to suggest this. There were nowhere near enough Persian soldiers in the American Civil War to determine whether prejudice against Persians specifically altered the outcome of his hearings (in fact, Kahn appears to have been the only Persian to fight in this war) but many people mistook Kahn for a Black or Native American man. A newspaper article written about Kahn after his death suggests that Congress was at first hesitant to award him a pension because they at first believed that he was “a worthless Negro, too lazy to work” but then relented upon finding out that he was actually Persian.⁴³⁴ Although the article is wildly inaccurate, it suggests that this type of prejudice existed, and that even if racism did not negatively affect the Persian Pvt. Kahn in his pension hearings, it may have negatively affected Black soldiers in their hearings. Differences in the outcomes and proceedings of pension

431. See Eric T Dean. *Shook Over Hell: Post Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

432. Ibid,

433. Ibid, 116

434. “An Oriental Pensioner.” *Abilene Weekly Reflector*. (Abilene, Kansas). 1891. 1

hearings between white and Black or non-white Civil War soldiers and sailors may be worth investigating once the records are available again.

Despite these setbacks, his efforts caused his pension to be increased from \$8 to \$12, and later \$14, even though witness testimony and the doctors' reports appear to support his claim that he was incapacitated from earning his subsistence through labor.⁴³⁵ Shortly thereafter, in 1891, he passed away at 55 years old. He is buried with members of other New York Regiments in the Cypress Hills National Cemetery under the name John Ammahaie.⁴³⁶ That same year, his life made the papers once more. An article describing Kahn's life, sometimes run under the heading "An Oriental Pensioner" and sometimes as "Mohammed Kahn, Pensioner" was originally written for the Louisville Courier Journal but was printed in at least eight other newspapers. The article is wildly inaccurate. It claims Kahn originally enlisted in a Massachusetts regiment, that he fought at the Battle of Bull Run, and re-enlisted in a Pennsylvania regiment after escaping the contraband camp. It also feeds into American stereotypes of Middle Easterners, as it claimed Kahn was an "expert swordsman" and "one of the household troops of the Persian emperor," though Kahn never claimed to be any of these things on record.⁴³⁷ The focus on his story speaks to the fascination Americans continued to have with the Middle East, and to the cottage industry for Civil War remembrances in the years following the Civil War. An unusual story like Kahn's would have been profitable, even if the printed story was barely accurate.

What can Kahn's story tell us about the lives of Muslims in the United States, and about the United States more generally? First, it reveals the mercurial nature of race in the 19th-Century

435. Ibid, 185

436. "John Ammahaie" Interment Control Forms, 1928–1962. Interment Control Forms, A1 2110-B. Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, 1774–1985, Record Group 92. The National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

437. "An Oriental Pensioner." *Abilene Weekly Reflector*. (Abilene, Kansas). 1891. 1

United States and how this may have affected uncommon immigrants' lives. At the time, race was typically understood as a dichotomy of "white" and "black," although "Chinese" and "Indian" (as in Native American) were also accepted racial categories in the census. Mohammed Kahn, and potentially others like him, could have faced a turbulent existence because they fell outside of this framework, as different racial identifiers could be conferred on them, with different consequences for each. His white commanding officers allowed Private Kahn to enlist in a white regiment on the assumption that, while he was not white, he was Native American, but as soon as other white people decided differently, he was rendered Black and treated as a contraband. Several witnesses claimed that after the war, Kahn wore his hair long,⁴³⁸ presented himself as an "Indian" and worked as an "Indian herbal doctor."⁴³⁹ The stereotype that Native Americans had a spiritual connection with the earth and were skilled healers as a result existed at the time, and Kahn probably hoped that this would attract more business. Judging by this evidence, Kahn was aware of his racial ambiguity and attempted to use it to his advantage.⁴⁴⁰ We can see a little evidence of conferred racial identity in Bernard Mahomet and Mohammed Abdullah's census records. Both men are listed as Black because they had dark skin, but they were unlikely to have been of Black African descent. We can also see evidence of a turbulent racial identity in Hadji Ali's story. He at first claimed to be Arab, but then insisted on his Greek heritage in order to avoid the prejudices that came with an Arab heritage. These turbulent racial identities were not due to their religion, they were due to their appearance, but given the birth

438. Approve Pension, Mohammed Kahn 23

439. Ibid, 126

440. Kahn may still have known something about medicine, though, since he was forced to work in a hospital as a contraband

nations and assigned racial categories of most Muslims discussed in this chapter, this may have been a common experience for them.

Kahn's pension also contains a crucial piece of evidence that the other records lack; evidence that he continued to practice Islam after immigrating. William S. Wright, a druggist who had known Kahn for twelve years by the time he testified in his pension hearings, claimed that Kahn would often come to his place of business to "buy drugs, got him to write his letters, make out his bills, and on one occasion brought with him for to read to him the Alkoran, or Mohammedan Bible."⁴⁴¹ If Kahn owned a Quran that he could read to Wright, it must have been in Arabic. This means he either brought it with him from Persia (in which case he would have had to carry it on his person throughout the war as he had no place of residence), his first wife brought it with her and he kept it, or else he had bought a Quran while in the United States. This third option was possible, as the Quran had been translated and sold in the United States, but Kahn could not read English, and finding an Arabic Quran would have been much more difficult and likely expensive, especially for an impoverished man like him. All three options suggest that the Quran and Islam were important to him. Reading the Quran with a friend or acquaintance also suggests a desire to share his faith. This may have represented the extent of Muslim worship among ordinary Muslims prior to Muhammed Webb's mission. Apart from Mohammed A. R. Webb and Emin Nabakoff's places of worship, there were no formal mosques in the 19th-century United States, so praying and reading the Quran alone or in a small group was the most they could do to continue their faith traditions. Unlike Webb, a natural born American who gained notoriety due in part to his faith, the ordinary, immigrant Muslims living in the US practiced their faith in private as they attempted to navigate an unfamiliar society.

441. Ibid, 25

Kahn, Moussa, and perhaps Said's stories raise questions about observance and faith traditions among Muslims living in the United States, especially among members of the military. Kahn's alcohol consumption could be considered proof that he was unobservant, as many Muslims choose not to consume alcohol for religious reasons, but many others do not view alcohol consumption as taboo and choose to consume it. Kahn clearly falls into this category. However, other questions are not so easily reconciled. How would a Muslim soldier pray during the war? They could not have carried a prayer rug with them, so if they chose to pray, it would have been on the bare ground. How did Kahn and others like him react when faced with the reality of consuming salted pork, the "principal meat ration" and source of protein for Union soldiers? They never said and, as is true of so many questions raised in this study, it is impossible to know for certain.

A Note About Captain Moses Osman, 115th Illinois

As scholarship on a particular topic evolves and new documents and resources are uncovered, mistakes in older scholarship may also be uncovered. After examining the evidence, I believe that Captain Moses Osman's identification as the highest-ranking Muslim to serve in the American Civil War is one such mistake. Osman has become an important enough figure that three separate House and Senate Resolutions calling on the United States government to recognize the accomplishments of American Muslims, have used him as an example of an important, accomplished Muslim.⁴⁴² At a time when Muslim Americans are treated with suspicion and disparaged as un-American due to their religion, it makes sense that members of

442. See Senate Resolution 214, introduced to the 116th Congress on May 21st 2019 by Sen. Corey Booker and accepted; House Resolution 869, introduced to the 115th Congress on May 3rd 2018 by Rep Judy Chu but not accepted; and House Resolution 276, introduced to the 116th Congress on April 1st 2019 and accepted.

the government would attempt to correct this perspective, and that a Civil War Captain in the Union Army would be included as an example. After all, what could be more American than fighting for the continued existence of the United States of America? Failing to acknowledge Osman at all in this study would seem odd under these circumstances, so I will briefly address his story.

Historian Amir N. Muhammed assumed that Captain Osman was Muslim due to his potentially Quranic last name.⁴⁴³ According to the Quran, Uthman Ibn Affan was the Prophet Mohammed's son in law.⁴⁴⁴ "Osman" being the Turkish equivalent of this name and one borne by multiple Ottoman Sultans,⁴⁴⁵ it would be reasonable to assume that Captain Osman was of Muslim heritage if he were Turkish and there was not documentary evidence to the contrary. Most of this evidence comes from his pension file and that of his widow, Zilpha, sometimes borne out as "Gilpha." On July 6th, 1895, their friends James and Laura Nash testified to having known Captain and Mrs. Osman before they were married, and that they had all attended the same church. This was done in order to prove that Captain and Mrs. Osman had indeed been formally married to each other and that she could continue to collect his pension after Captain Osman's death.⁴⁴⁶ Mrs. Osman also testified that they had been married by a traveling Methodist

443. Robin Wright. "Humayun Khan Isn't the Only Muslim American Hero." *The New Yorker Magazine*. August 15 2016. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/humayun-khan-isnt-the-only-muslim-american-hero>

444. Asma Afsaruddin. "Uthman Ibn Affan." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. June 13 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Uthman-ibn-Affan>

445. "Osman I" *Encyclopedia Britannica*. January 1 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Osman-I>

446. War Department, the Adjutant General's Office. "Approved Pension File for Gilpha [sic] Osman, Widow of Moses Osman, 1st Illinois Infantry Regiment (Sergeant, Mexican War) and Company A, 104th Illinois Infantry Regiment (Captain, Civil War) (WC-10284)" <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/74193866> Accessed 9 April 2021.

minister, although she had no paper record of the marriage.⁴⁴⁷ This suggests that Captain and Mrs. Osman were practicing Christians, at least after Osman's service. It is possible that Captain Osman had been Muslim but converted to Christianity. However, this conclusion is questionable, as Osman's name appears in an 1843 confirmation record for Zion German Lutheran Church in Harrisburg Pennsylvania,⁴⁴⁸ the same church that his stepmother, Catherine Osman, is buried at.⁴⁴⁹ Judging by the date of birth provided in his military records, he would have been a teenager when he was confirmed, and since it is a confirmation record, he must have been baptized into Christianity prior to this. There is also no evidence to suggest that Osman was of Turkish origin, as censuses for 1850-1880 state that he was born in "Pennsylvania."⁴⁵⁰ It is also possible that his father, Robert Osman, was of Muslim or Turkish origin, but this is unlikely as according to his headstone, Robert Osman was born in New Jersey in 1765,⁴⁵¹ and there is no record of Turkish immigration to the United States before 1820.⁴⁵²

Given the evidence, it appears that Captain Osman has been misidentified in this case and that he was, in fact a Christian of Christian heritage. However, it is important to stress that Senator Corey Booker and Representative Judy Chu, who introduced these bills in their

447. Ibid, 137

448. *Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Church and Town Records, 1669-2013* Digitized by Ancestry.com. https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/7177438:2451?tid=&pid=&queryId=938bc8b53dc5416d35a943b3f3f690ab&_phsrc=rCT453&_phstart=successSource 152. Accessed 9 April 2021.

449. "Catherine Schreiber Osman." Findagrave.com <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/161034844/catherine-osman> Accessed 9 April 2021.

450. "Moses Osman." *1850 United States Federal Census* Digitized by Ancestry.com https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/19196057:8054?tid=&pid=&queryId=a9efc99afc23f1f23f8d97759adf0ba3&_phsrc=rCT455&_phstart=successSource Accessed 9 April 2021.

451. "Robert Osman" *Findagrave.com*. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/161035078/robert-osman>. Accessed 9 April 2021.

452. Sebnem Koser Akcapar, "Turkish Associations in the United States: Towards Building a Transnational Identity," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10 Issue 2, 167

respective chambers of Congress, were right to do so. They are correct that “American Muslims have long served in the Nation’s Armed Forces and fought in all major United States conflicts, from the Revolutionary War to present day.”⁴⁵³ As the stories of Mohammed Kahn, Hadji Ali, and Ali Ben Moussa, perhaps in addition to other soldiers and sailors who cannot be properly identified due to a lack of documents, this included the American Civil War. The fact that this particular Civil War captain was probably not Muslim in no way diminishes the accomplishments of American Muslims or the many ways in which they have served, protected, and built the United States of America.

19th-Century Muslim Immigrants in Perspective

The story of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era as a story of immigration is not a new idea. Recent scholarship by historians like Ryan W. Keating, Cian T. McMahon, and Christina Bearden-White have centered Irish and German immigrants, as they two of the largest groups of immigrants, in the American Civil War. Muslim immigrants are not a group typically focused on in studies of 19th Century immigration to the United States, but many of stories in this chapter are familiar. Most of these people immigrated to cities, worked in manual labor jobs such as mining, or worked as domestic servants for America’s wealthy. As such, they probably lived in some degree of poverty, and as is illustrated by Mohammed Kahn, not all of them spoke English when they arrived in the United States. This is the archetypical American immigrant story, and though it does not accurately represent all immigrants to the United States, it was the reality many in the 19th century faced. According to Ryan W. Keating’s book *Shades of Green*, 70% of Irish immigrants in New York City, the largest ethnic enclave in the United States, worked in

453. House of Representatives “H.Res.276- Recognizing American Muslims’ History and Contribution to our Nation.” *116th Congress (2019-2020)*. Congress.gov. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/276> Accessed 9 April 2021

unskilled labor. 1/3 of those who arrived during the Irish Potato Famine, which began approximately 20 years before the Civil War, worked as domestic servants,⁴⁵⁴ and lived in uncomfortable tenements with decreasing opportunities for artisans, increasing costs of land, and poverty constraining them to unskilled labor and life in neighborhoods near their ports of entry.⁴⁵⁵ Bernard Mahomet and Mohammed Kahn both lived in Boston, which was similarly cramped with poor job opportunities for immigrants, but Boston's "tradition of cultural exclusivity...meant that social antagonisms could not be so easily diverted."⁴⁵⁶ Most of Mohamet's fellow boarders were Irish domestic servants, and they likely endured similar working conditions and struggles. According to Keating, high rates of transience also plagued Irish immigrants in Boston,⁴⁵⁷ and Kahn appears to have been transient, though this appears to have been more of a problem for him in Connecticut than in Boston. Regardless, his inability to stay in one place for a long period of time speaks to his poverty.

An obvious question when considering immigration is why they immigrated. Some may have come to perform a job as the Mohammed brothers in the Gold Hill Circus did. In their case, they and the other Moroccans in their troupe may have been recruited. Nicholas Said never intended to immigrate but did travel to the United States to work and ended up stranded there. The other cases are much less clear cut. The Turkish immigrants may have left due to war, as multiple wars, including the Crimean War in the 1850's⁴⁵⁸, the Mount Lebanon Civil War in

454. Ryan W Keating. *Shades of Green: Irish Regiments, American Soldiers, and Local Communities in the Civil War Era*, 1-18. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017.) 8

455. Ibid, 9

456. Ibid,

457. Ibid

458. "Crimean War." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 9/27/2020.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Crimean-War>

1860 (though most of the casualties of this war were Christian)⁴⁵⁹, the Russo-Turkish War in the 1870's, and many smaller revolts took place during the 19th century during what is often referred to as "The Great Eastern Crisis."⁴⁶⁰ Persian and Indian immigrants may have fled the Anglo-Persian War (also known as the Anglo-Iranian War), which took place from 1856 to 1857, with many Indian combatants fighting for the British.⁴⁶¹ They may also have left to flee poverty or for more personal reasons, as immigrants from all over the world did.

Although there are similarities between individual 19th century Muslim immigrants and members other more prominent groups, there are many key differences, the largest of which being that the Muslim immigrants were not culturally unified in the same way more famous groups of immigrants were. Political and cultural unity was especially helpful and important for Irish immigrants. Interconnected Irish communities aided Irish people in confronting complex social situations in their new homes, and played a prominent role in organizing Irish specific regiments.⁴⁶² Service in the Civil War would later give the Irish immigrants and their children a privileged position over newer groups of immigrants, such as those from Eastern and Southern Europe, that arrived after the Civil War and helped them to gain political power in the postbellum period.⁴⁶³ German immigrants did not benefit from this type of unity as much prior to the start of the Civil War. As Christina Bearden-White notes, "There was no Germany in 1860.

459 See Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion For War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1994.)

460. Stanford J. Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.) 182

461. J. Calmard, "ANGLO-PERSIAN WAR (1856-57)," *Encyclopædia Iranica*
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anglo-persian-war-1856-57>, Accessed 10 April 2021.

462. *Ibid*, 14

463. Cian T McMahan. "'American by Nationality Yet Irish by Race': Citizenship in the Wake of the Civil War, 1865–1880." In *The Global Dimensions of Irish Identity: Race, Nation, and the Popular Press, 1840-1880*, 145-78. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). 147

German unification would not happen until 1871. While there was a loose German Confederation of thirty-nine states created in 1815... The German states lacked a cohesive, unified, and easily articulated national identity”⁴⁶⁴ and German immigrants to the United States were no different. Many claimed not to be “German” but Bavarian, Austrian, Hannoverian, or Hessian among other descriptors.⁴⁶⁵ That being said, Americans’ understanding of Germany as one entity did at least somewhat force Germans together both politically and socially, and there was still enough German cohesion that German language newspapers could be printed in the United States.⁴⁶⁶ None of this was true for the immigrants discussed in this chapter.

Of the nationalities touched upon in this chapter, Turkish immigration is the most written about, and German immigrants’ situation may be somewhat analogous to the Turkish Muslim immigrants’ situation. The Ottoman Empire was diverse in terms of religion and ethnicity, and Ottoman citizens did not necessarily consider themselves one people, despite that shared government. In addition, the Turkish state as it is known today did not exist until 1923, so they, too, lacked a unified state.

There is some debate among historians as to how many Turkish Muslims arrived in the United States during the 19th century. In her article “Turkish-American Immigration History and Identity Formations”, Ilhan Kaya states that about 300,000 people immigrated to the United States from areas under the rule of the Ottoman Empire between 1820 and 1920.” She further claims that only about 50,000 of those immigrants were Muslim Turks while the rest were

464 Christina Bearden-White. "Illinois Germans and the Coming of the Civil War: Reshaping Ethnic Identity." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1998-) 109, no. 3 (2016): 234-235.

465. *Ibid*, 234

466. *Ibid*, 240.

Armenians, Greeks, Jews and other Muslim groups under Ottoman rule.”⁴⁶⁷ Historian Sabnem Koser Akcapar offers a few potential theories, though he does not offer a direct answer to this question. He points out that official statistics portray Turkish immigration “insignificant until 1900,” but notes that “many immigrants whose country of last residence was listed as Turkey” arrived between 1900 and 1915.⁴⁶⁸ Akcapar provides a chart from the *2004 Yearbook Of Immigration Statistics* which states that the first “Turkish” immigrant arrived in 1820, and from 1820 to 1900, 34,912 “Turkish” people immigrated to the United States (although it is worth noting that a full 87% of those immigrants arrived between 1890 and 1900).⁴⁶⁹ Of that number, around 10% are likely to have been Muslim.⁴⁷⁰ However, this does not reflect the whole picture. Akcapar explains that American authorities registered many of the Turkish immigrants under ethnic or religious affiliation, making it difficult to determine a country of origin for all of them after the fact.⁴⁷¹ Even more consequentially for the purposes of studying census records, many Turks identified themselves as Armenian Christians or Anglicized their names in order to enter the United States more easily.⁴⁷² Though he was not Turkish, Mohammed Kahn appears to have Anglicized his name, at least temporarily, as several people who knew him after the war testified to knowing him by the very English sounding name “Mr. Gray.”⁴⁷³ No variation of “John Ammahaie” or “Mohammed Kahn” appears on any census taken during Pvt. Kahn’s life, but plenty of men with the last name “Gray” do. Depending on how widespread this deception was,

467. Ilhan Kaya.. “Turkish-American Immigration History and Identity Formations.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 24 (Issue 2), 2004. 297.

468. Sebne Koser Akcapar, 'Turkish Associations in the United States: Towards Building a Transnational Identity', *Turkish Studies*, 167

469. Ibid, 168

470. Ibid

471. Ibid, 169

472. Ibid

473. Approved Pension File, Kahn, 126

there may have been far more Turkish Muslims in the United States than is possible to determine. This may also say something about the Turkish immigrants who have been mentioned in this thesis. Their unwillingness to hide their identities may mean that they considered their identities more important than other Turks did.

Perhaps the most important piece of the puzzle when comparing Muslim Turkish immigration to that of other groups is the nature of their migration. Though most immigrated to flee poverty, as many Irish and German immigrants did, most Muslim Turkish immigrants regarded their immigration as temporary. They attempted to earn and save as much money as possible before returning home and felt little need to establish roots in the United States.⁴⁷⁴ This would explain why most of the Turkish Muslims discussed in this section were not featured in more than one census. Though it is possible that this same pattern of migration existed among the other nationalities mentioned in this thesis, there is not much scholarship about them at the moment, and the primary sources necessary to research them do not appear to be digitized. Perhaps a better explanation can be found at a later date.

It is important to emphasize here that Islam is a universal religion, not an ethnic one, and its followers are ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse. While this is perhaps even more true now thanks to globalization, it was true in the 19th century as well. Tempting as it may be to view the people discussed in this chapter as one group, a Moroccan Muslim would have been quite different culturally from a Persian Muslim, who in turn would have been different from a Turkish Muslim or an Egyptian Muslim. Even among these groups there would have been differences due to ethnic group and sect among others. Though they faced many of the same struggles that most immigrants faced, they did not settle in any particular place and were not

474. Ibid, 169

unified by the same language, ethnicity, or culture. Even if we divide these immigrants into individual, majority-Muslim ethnic groups, there were not all that many of them, and at least in the case of Turkish Muslims, they did not settle down in any particular place or attempt to lay down roots most of the time. There do not appear to have been particular ethnic neighborhoods for the immigrants described and they were unlikely to encounter other people from their homelands or even people who spoke their language. Though most immigrants were to an extent disadvantaged, this would have put them at an extreme disadvantage. Not only might they not speak or read English, but they were unlikely to encounter anyone who spoke their language, less likely to find people who would or could help them, and had fewer means of addressing shared struggles. Hadji Ali and Mohammed Kahn both suffered due to their ethnicities to the point where both of them tried to hide them, and this experience was unlikely to have been unique to them. Muslim immigrants' experiences in the 19th century did not lead to greater political power or unity in the United States within their religion, ethnicities, or nationalities, leaving them at a disadvantage until at least the 20th century.

Conclusion

The story of ordinary Muslim immigrants in the 19th-century United States is a puzzle, and one that is difficult if not impossible to solve fully due to the relatively small number of records available and the fragmentary nature of available documents. This is one of the many challenges of writing a history of ordinary people over 100 years after the fact. Despite this, a few conclusions can be reached based on available documents and reasonable extrapolation.

First, as Mohammed Webb's mission did not cause the wave of conversion he had hoped it would, the vast majority of Muslims in the 19th-century United States were immigrants from majority Muslim countries, although some were freemen or victims of the Atlantic slave trade.

Census records suggest that Muslim immigrants and immigrants from majority Muslim countries were a fractured, widespread group rather than being a group or groups that settled in a high enough density to create majority Muslim or ethnic-specific communities, at least for most of the 19th century. They settled all over the country and at least in the case of Turkish immigrants, did not typically set down roots there as they regarded their immigration as a temporary economic investment. As evidenced by the Mohammed brothers, they sometimes made a living based on their heritage or appearance, which many Americans would have considered exotic. Most do not appear to have attempted to settle in the United States permanently, and were single men looking for work. It has been established that Turkish Muslims often hid their identity by changing their names or hiding their heritages in order to enter the United States more easily, though it is unclear whether other Muslim groups did this too. As is evidenced by their presence in census records, some Turkish people refused to hide their identities despite the greater difficulties this may have caused. Other Muslims may have done this because, as is discussed in chapter one, many Americans did distrust Muslims, but there is no evidence that they did so at the moment. Turkish Muslims, and potentially Muslims of other heritages, who refused to hide their identities are able to be tracked down, and so they, unfortunately, form the basis for most of the scholarship despite potentially not making up the bulk of the group. Their presence at least proves that there were Muslims in the 19th-century United States, and that they lived around the country working in various, usually working class, occupations. This is a similar story to many other groups of immigrants.

Second, we can conclude that many of the people who did make a life in the United States, such as Hadji Ali, Mohammed Kahn, Nicholas Said, Akdar Abdullah, and most likely Mohammed Abdallah and the Mohammed brothers, faced life in a nation that did not know what

to make of them due to their races not fitting into existing American dichotomies. Most of the immigrants were not of European or Black African ancestry but were labeled as “white” or “Black” nonetheless and treated as such. Kahn’s arrest as a contraband may well have been one of a kind and occurred in extreme circumstances, but Ali’s discrimination due to his Arab heritage (both in terms of marriage laws and the barriers he faced when attempting to gain a pension or become a citizen) may have been more common. Kahn was judged as Black or Native American while Ali could pass as white, so they were not treated the same. Other apparent Muslims in the census are identified as white or Black, and they faced different outcomes and discrimination based on how they were perceived. The suspicion directed towards Muslims may also have factored into this discrimination, but probably not as much as their perceived race. Though it is not necessarily the subject of this thesis, this finding has implications for studying more uncommon immigrants during this time period, meaning people who immigrated to the United States in small numbers rather than as part of an exodus or after one. In any case, these immigrants, and perhaps immigrants from other less common countries of origin, faced unique difficulties in the United States due to confusion about their origins, distrust of them once they found out, and the lower prevalence of cultural roots in the United States when compared to other nationalities.

Lastly, we can conclude that the story of 19th-century Muslim immigration is not entirely comparable to that of larger groups that immigrated during this time period. Muslim immigrants were not a unified group, were culturally diverse, and many immigrated with the intent to return to their home countries. That being said, there are similar threads in their stories when compared to other immigrant groups. Many of their stories fit the somewhat mythologized mold of the American immigrant story, with the difference being that many or most of them did not remain

in the United States for long. It is possible that this smaller, earlier trickle of immigration from majority Muslim states influenced the waves of migration that began in the 20th and 21st centuries, but how much it influenced them has not yet been determined. An in-depth study of immigration records, such as ships' manifests, would be a useful in determining if there were immigration patterns among Muslim immigrants. Perhaps one can be conducted when the records are available again.

Conclusion

The Continuing Story of Islam in the United States

Millions of American Muslims, immigrant and native born, comprise two percent of the total population of the United States, and have built a vibrant community of diverse races, ethnicities, viewpoints, and backgrounds... Countless American Muslims contribute to our Nation's economy and well-being as physicians, business owners, laborers, service workers, teachers engaging the next generation of Americans, and police officers, firefighters, and first responders saving lives every day... many African slaves brought to the Americas, including the American colonies, later known as the United States of America, were Muslim, and made innumerable contributions to the founding of our Nation... [and] American Muslims have long served in the Nation's Armed Forces and fought in all major United States conflicts, from the Revolutionary War to present day⁴⁷⁵

-Excerpt from H.Res.276- Recognizing American Muslims' History and Contribution to our Nation

1865-1900 was a time of great change in the United States. With the end of the American Civil War came a wide variety of changes, most prominently the end of slavery and the beginning of the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877). Much less remembered are the changes that had broader implications internationally. The United States had a greater political reach abroad, leading to greater diplomatic efforts, including with majority Muslim powers. With this greater certainty that came with the end of the war, came an increase in travel both for pleasure and missionary work. Immigration also increased after the end of the war with over twelve million immigrants arriving in the United States between 1870 and 1900. Most of these immigrants were European, but, as demonstrated by the census records used in this thesis, they came from elsewhere, too.⁴⁷⁶ This led to greater cultural exchange, but also animosity, as was demonstrated by the further immigration restrictions also put in place during this time period.⁴⁷⁷ All of these factors led to changes in US perspectives on a wide variety of topics, including culture, travel, and, most relevant to this thesis, religion.

475. House of Representatives "H.Res.276- Recognizing American Muslims' History and Contribution to our Nation." *116th Congress (2019-2020)*. Congress.gov.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/276>

476. "Immigration to the United States, 1851-1900." *The Library of Congress*.

<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/rise-of-industrial-america-1876-1900/immigration-to-united-states-1851-1900/>

477. Ibid

Through this lens of change, we can understand US Americans' evolving understanding of Islam. In addition to Christian missionaries and diplomats, ordinary Americans travelled for fun after the end of the Civil War to the "Holy Lands," which tended to have large Muslim populations. Christian missionaries had continued to operate in majority Muslim countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa even during the US Civil War, and, while they continued to portray Islam and Muslims as antithetical to Western society out of the belief that mass conversion to Christianity was necessary, other Americans acquired a wider variety of perspectives. Travel writers documented their experiences in lands described as exotic and alien, albeit through a very Western lens. They then published narratives about their travels in newspapers, magazines, and in the case of authors like Mark Twain, full novels. These works allowed Americans who could not otherwise travel to vicariously experience their "adventures in the Holy Lands." Through these communications, we can see the development of new thoughts and ideas which came to define Americans' understanding of Islam. Some held on to the mainstream, Christian missionary perspective that Islam was dangerous or antithetical to Western society, others believed Muslims were unfortunate, but not to be feared; others simply believed Muslims were strange foreigners, and some had somewhat positive perspectives, framing Muslims as industrious or as progressive on women's rights. Although most publications partially reinforced Christian missionaries' belief that Muslims were antithetical to western society by portraying them as bizarre, sinister, or as pieces of scenery rather than people, a few authors did honestly try to educate their fellow Americans about a faith they believed was maligned unfairly.

This variety of understandings along with the religious tension at the heart of the Third Great Awakening (1890-1920), a time period in which existing theology began to clash with the

modern economy, new developments in science, and labor unrest. This caused many middle-class, educated, Christian US citizens to look for ways to reconcile their religious beliefs with the world as it was. Some turned to more liberal forms of Christianity, others abandoned religion entirely, and some turned to other religions. It was in this moment of religious exploration in the US that “Mohammed” Alexander Russell Webb established the United States’ first Muslim mission: The American Islamic Propaganda. He converted to Islam after a long period of exploration, and, as with the many other Americans who were also experiencing a period of religious exploration, he believed his home country was ripe for conversion. The version of Islam preached at these missions had been adapted to suit an American audience, with a special emphasis on cleanliness and sexual morality. Perhaps as a consequence of the aforementioned tensions, the movement attracted a small but devoted following. This indicates the religious change occurring in the United States and suggested the possibility of domestic Islam as a broader presence in the future. It is also worth noting that the movement’s presence indicates the United States’ broader global reach after the end of the Civil War, as Webb and many of his associates converted to Islam after studying it using translated Qurans, or after communicating with Muslims abroad, as Webb did when he contacted Mirza Ghulum Ahmad.

Press coverage of the Propaganda and its competitors also speaks to the varying opinions US citizens had of Islam. Some publications were amenable to the idea that Islam could become a force in US religious life, and some were opposed to or terrified of the idea, much like the broader public. Unsuccessful as the American Islamic Propaganda and its competitors ultimately were in achieving this goal, its presence in the United States and at the World Parliament of Religions demonstrates a changing religious landscape. The type of Islam Webb and his associates preached represented just one way Islam may have been practiced in the United

States. Another is represented by the presence of Quranic names in census and military records and in stories like Private Kahn's, whose religious faith is at least somewhat documented. Webb and his associates represented a white, middle- to upper-class movement that included people who converted in response to the changing religious landscape. By contrast, most of the Quranic names in the census and military records belonged to immigrants from a wide variety of nationalities, ethnicities, and backgrounds. In the cases of Mohammed Kahn and Hadji Ali, their uncommon ethnic backgrounds and, at least to US Americans, ethnic ambiguity, left of them in a precarious state of racial transience. As a result of this, different identities were assigned to them by different people, with varying consequences for each. Kahn was often regarded as Native American, but was forced to work as a contraband when regarded as Black, and Ali was probably denied his pension due to his Arab heritage and therefore insisted he was Greek later in life. This has broader implications for researching uncommon groups of immigrants throughout US history, where immigrants who did not strictly fit existing racial dichotomies or expectations may have found themselves in a state of flux.

This thesis set out to prove that the story of Islam in the United States did not begin in the 20th-century, nor was there a gap in the story between the end of slavery and the beginning of the 20th century. During the postbellum period, Islam continued to be practiced in the United States, but the face of it changed as immigration and domestic conversion became the normal way it spread as opposed to enslavement. This, combined with the expanded diplomatic reach of the US and the growing tourism industry, led to opinions of Islam changing in the US, with altered implications for its Muslim residents. The first Muslims to live in the US and the Thirteen Colonies before that were enslaved or formerly enslaved people whose religious beliefs were eventually crushed due to suppression and distance from their cultures. In the postbellum period,

immigration increased, Americans converted to an Americanized form of Islam, and perhaps a small number of formerly enslaved people continued to practice Islam as it was passed down by their ancestors that would have heavily mingled with the various religious practices of enslaved people. Religions adapt to the cultures they are practiced in; as is demonstrated by the case of Mohammed A.R. Webb's philosophical Islam, this can sometimes be purposeful, or, as in the case of enslaved Muslims, it can be the result of cultural exchange. This means that, in the postbellum period, Islam would have been practiced in a variety of forms in the United States, and would naturally continue to change and adapt later on.

What is not clear from this thesis is what affect, if any, these 19th-century perspectives, Muslim movements, and Muslim immigration had on the many Islamic movements that rose to prominence in the 20th-century United States. Likewise, it is not clear how they may have affected the lives of Muslim immigrants, who immigrated in much greater numbers in the 20th century. A 20th-century US historian will likely note immediately that while the earliest Muslim movement in the United States, the American Islamic Propaganda, was largely a white organization (as Webb rebuffed the Indian Muslims who already lived in the United States despite accepting funding from Indians, and was attempting to appeal to a white, middle class audience), the most famous and long lasting Muslim movements of the 20th century were Black nationalist movements, such as the Moorish Science Temple⁴⁷⁸ and Nation of Islam.⁴⁷⁹ There is no connection between the American Islamic Propaganda and these 20th-century movements except for their shared ties to American Islam.

478. "Moorish Science Temple of America." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 17, 2009. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moorish-Science-Temple-of-America>.

479. J. Gordon Melton. "Nation of Islam." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 1, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nation-of-Islam>.

This lack of a direct connection to 19th-century Muslim movements in the US does not mean that the beliefs expressed in 20th-century Islamic movements were formed in a vacuum; many of the views of Islam expressed in the 19th century can be connected to the twentieth century. Brent Turner credits Edward Wilmot Blyden with laying “the intellectual groundwork for what was to become Islam’s great emotional appeal for African Americans in the twentieth century” through his positive writing and vision of a “race blind Islam.”⁴⁸⁰ He also describes the attitude of “Black bitterness toward racism in Christianity” as a factor that turned some Black Christians away from Christianity and towards Islam, especially in the 1890’s.⁴⁸¹ The rise of the Moorish Science Temple and Nation of Islam are in part consequences of this among many other factors such as the Great Migration, the rise of nativism, and the ever present factor of anti-Black racism in the United States.⁴⁸² Multi-racial Muslim movements formed in the twentieth century as well, with the most prominent of them being the Ahmaddiyya Mission, which began in New York in the 1920’s. Although it was initially a multi-racial movement, it later became focused mostly on Black Muslims.⁴⁸³ It would be worthwhile to explore how much 19th-century attitudes about Islam influenced these 20th-century movements in future scholarship. A preliminary conclusion one could reach from this available information is that there have so far been three stages in US attitudes towards Islam. At the US’s inception, the only people practicing Islam domestically were enslaved persons, who really had no political power or prominence and were not citizens. As a result, Islam was understood as an entirely foreign concept until the mid-19th century or so. In the mid-to-late-19th century, increased travel for pleasure, immigration by

480. Turner, 53

481. Ibid, 59-60

482. Ibid, 75

483. Ibid, 117

Muslims, and a handful of prominent converts to Islam led to the religion being understood as a mostly foreign concept in the United States, but one that could become a factor in US religious life. To some, especially evangelical Christians, this would have been considered a disaster, and Islam is therefore treated as a threat in their publications. More accepting publications treated it as a positive development or ambivalently. This perspective likely shifted in the 20th century, as Islam became an indisputably domestic practice, being practiced by immigrants and domestic converts, most of them Black. A study into how attitudes towards Islam changed from the 19th to 20th-century US would be a worthwhile study.

As was discussed in chapters one and two, US citizens expressed mixed feelings about Islam and people from majority-Muslim countries, and many of these opinions were negative. The 20th century brought increased immigration to the United States from majority Muslim countries and, as is often the case in US history, this was immediately followed by tighter immigration restrictions due to hostility toward a particular group of immigrants. As it relates to Islam in the US, the most prominent of these was the Immigration Act of 1924, sometimes called the “Johnson-Reed Act” or the “Oriental Exclusion Act.” This established an “Asiatic Barred Zone,” which denied immigration visas to anyone from Asia except for China (which was already barred under the Chinese Exclusion Act) and the Philippines as it was still a US colony.⁴⁸⁴ Although this act encompassed all of Asia, including many countries without significant Muslim populations, it might be worth exploring whether attitudes towards Islam, or religious differences in general, were factors in this increased anti-Asian sentiment.

484. “The Immigration Act of 1924 (the Johnson-Reed Act).” *United States Department of State, Office of the Historian*. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act> Accessed 23 April 2021.

History does not occur in a vacuum, and the 19th-century acted as the foundation for 20th-century. As is demonstrated by this thesis, Islam in the United States and US views on Islam evolved over time due to a variety of factors such as increased immigration and travel. Increased travel following the end of the Civil War led to a wider variety of perspectives on Islam as more US citizens encountered it. This led to an increased spread of information and misinformation about Islam in the United States, enabling the creation of the first US Muslim mission. This may have impacted the lives of the few Muslim immigrants in the United States at the time, as is evidenced by the lives of Hadji Ali and Mohammed Kahn, whose race and religious beliefs made them prominent figures but also caused them to be discriminated against at times. This was more primarily due to their race, though, with their religion acting as just another factor that othered them. How attitudes towards Islam and Muslims continued to evolve and affect people in the 20th-century, and in turn the 21st-century, would be worthwhile to study in the future.

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