

**Muslims in the United States:
The State of Research**

Karen Isaksen Leonard

New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003. 199 pages.

Karen Leonard's book, *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research*, seeks to provide "a useful research tool for exploring" the large body of social science research that exists on Islam and Muslims in the United States (p. ix). As a "non-Muslim secular scholar" and anthropologist (p. xi), she reviews research that examines the lives of all those who self-identify as Muslim, including those generally excluded from such discussions, such as Ahmedis, Five Percenters, and homosexuals. The variety of topics explored in this review promises to draw a broad readership. Topics as diverse as immigration and racialization, international conflicts and intra-Muslim tensions, "un-mosqued" Muslims and extremist ideologues are all covered. Therefore, those interested in sociology, history, religion, and, more specifically, individuals researching Islam and Muslims will benefit from reading *Muslims in the United States*.

The book is divided into three sections. In part 1, "Historical Overview of Muslims in the United States," Leonard briefly introduces Islam's basic tenets and proceeds to discuss the historical and political realities that affected the growth of African-American, Arab, and South Asian Muslim populations in this country. She identifies three sets of issues that have his-

torically arisen in research and theory building on Muslims in the United States: legitimacy as it relates to African-American Muslim movements, the problem of religious authority in the smaller national-origin and sectarian communities, and the lack of research on the lives of “un-mosqued,” “invisible,” or secular Muslims.

Part 2, “Contemporary Research Issues,” builds on many of the issues of representation, authority, and pluralism raised in the previous section. The author explores the various factors that Muslims draw on to create personal or collective identities, including “national origin, language, ethnicity, sectarian affiliation, race, and/or class,” as well as “generation, gender, and sexuality” (p. 52). In this section, Leonard provides support for a claim that she made in the introduction:

Unlike those who see the striving toward a universal umma, or community, as the overarching narrative for all Muslim experience, I see the persistence of *asabiyya*, [or] group solidarity and experience (groups based on national origin, language, race, and/or ethnicity), as a very important theme. (p. xii)

Given that many Muslims throughout the world actually believe in the presence and reality of a universal ummah, this argument and its proofs are incredibly important to contemporary Islamic thought. Rather than perpetuating the notion of a universal ummah, Leonard draws on numerous studies that demonstrate the division of the American Muslim “community” along ethnic, national origin, class, and gender lines. The causes and consequences of these divisions are discussed in this section and the following one.

Although Leonard identifies possible areas for further research throughout the book, she discusses these problematics in greater detail in part 3, aptly entitled “Further Research.” In order to have a more comprehensive body of literature on Muslims in the United States, she argues that scholarship on Islam and Muslims must become more inclusive of non-Sunni narratives, and that research on African-American and immigrant Muslims must enter into greater dialogue. Even though this book was only published in 2002, Leonard still importantly identifies new trends in American Muslim communities that could affect future research on Muslims in the United States.

She notes that in the aftermath of 9/11, American Muslims have become more assertive of their American identities and appear to have become more actively involved in fighting to preserve their civil liberties and the existence of democracy, largely in response to a rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes.

Leonard also observes that Muslims in the United States appear to be more open to discussing the conflicts among various American Muslim groups. Finally, they appear to be speaking out more strongly against militant ideologies, such as those that appear to have motivated the 9/11 attacks.

One of the unique qualities of Leonard's book is the three appendices that follow her review of the research. The first appendix, "Overview of the Major Divisions in the Islamic Old World," is a diagram designed to assist the reader's understanding of the divisions within Islam and among Muslims. This diagram is especially helpful, since it not only provides a visual presentation of Islam's major sects, but also lists the corresponding dates and leaders associated with each. For a beginning student of Islam, this diagram is a valuable heuristic.

Appendix 2, "Major Muslim American Organizations," lists and categorizes some of the major American Muslim organizations into three groups: African-American Muslim Organizations, American Islamic Organizations, and American Muslim Political Organizations. Finally, the third appendix, "U.S. Local and Regional Studies of Muslims in America," categorizes research on Muslims in the United States by city and state. Although it is useful, an addition of short abstracts for each study would have been far more valuable.

Throughout her book, Leonard relies on important descriptive statistics derived from a couple of core studies to paint a portrait of Muslims in the United States. While these statistics are important and useful, charts or tables that visually depict the numbers would likely enrich the reader's understanding. Despite the few areas that I felt could have been improved, this book effectively fulfilled its goal. *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* is undoubtedly a valuable reference for students and scholars.

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