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# Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, And Hip Hop In The United States



## Synopsis

Interviews with young, black Muslims in Chicago explore the complexity of those with identities formed at the crossroads of Islam and hip hop. This groundbreaking study of race, religion and popular culture in the 21st century United States focuses on a new concept, "Muslim Cool." Muslim Cool is a way of being an American Muslim "displayed in ideas, dress, social activism in the hood, and in complex relationships to state power. Constructed through hip hop and the performance of Blackness, Muslim Cool is a way of engaging with the Black American experience by both Black and non-Black young Muslims that challenges racist norms in the U.S. as well as dominant ethnic and religious structures within American Muslim communities." Drawing on over two years of ethnographic research, Su'ad Abdul Khabeer illuminates the ways in which young and multiethnic U.S. Muslims draw on Blackness to construct their identities as Muslims. This is a form of critical Muslim self-making that builds on interconnections and intersections, rather than divisions between "Black" and "Muslim." Thus, by countering the notion that Blackness and the Muslim experience are fundamentally different, Muslim Cool poses a critical challenge to dominant ideas that Muslims are "foreign" to the United States and puts Blackness at the center of the study of American Islam. Yet Muslim Cool also demonstrates that connections to Blackness made through hip hop are critical and contested "critical because they push back against the pervasive phenomenon of anti-Blackness and contested because questions of race, class, gender, and nationality continue to complicate self-making in the United States.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A must read for any student of anthropology, religion, migration, or urban studies."-Choice  
An intense and novel anthropological approach to the development of the relationship between African American Muslims--the original American face of Islam--and immigrant Muslims and their children. An absolute must-read."-Aminah Beverly McCloud, DePaul University  
Offers an account of how Muslims in Chicago feel, think, and act. Fashionistas, hip-hop heads, and activists will recognize this scholarly work as chronicling the edginess of a possible future. Imagine Black Power meets twenty-first century faith-based social justice and cultural organizing. A must read for all those who didn't know, and even those who do!"-Junaid Rana, author of *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora*  
"Muslim Cool" brilliantly spotlights how Black Muslim youth construct and perform identities that embody indigenous forms of Black cultural production. Equally important, the text shows how these constructions are used to reimagine, reshape, and resist hegemonic and often anti-Black conceptions of Muslim identity. With masterful ethnographic detail, Abdul Khabeer offers a subtle and rich analysis of the complex relationships between race, religion, and state power. This book is a desperately needed intervention within Anthropology, Africana Studies, and Islamic Studies."-Marc Lamont Hill, author of *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity*  
"A skilled ethnographer, [Su'ad Abdul Khabeer] combines her poet's ear and thorough research in prose that flips the script on the anti-Black, anti-Muslim sentiment."-Ebony  
"In times when both Islam and Hip Hop have been constructed as threats to American civilization • by some, Muslim Cool presents a much-needed, rigorous analysis backed by rich, ethnographic detail to present a far more nuanced and intriguing story • a story that is central to understanding current U.S. racial, religious, and political landscapes. Through Khabeer's groundbreaking research and carefully crafted narrative and argumentation, we discover the journeys of young Muslims who find, through Hip Hop, a way of being Muslim that helps them challenge anti-Black racism in their everyday lives and interactions with systemic inequalities. Muslim Cool is, as dead prez once rapped, bigger than Hip Hop • it is a must-read for anyone interested in race, religion and culture in contemporary America."-H. Samy Alim, author of *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture*

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and African American Studies at Purdue University (IN).

This is THE book on Islam and hip hop! Brilliant and beautifully written.

here is a comment from jeremy spencer "Muslims have helped us to be more American, to be better Americans," writes Loyola Marymount University theology professor Amir Hussain in his new book *Muslims and the Making of America*. Yet his volume offers little support for this multicultural, politically correct thesis. "There has never been an America without Muslims," Hussain states while noting Muslims among America's African slaves both before and after the United States' founding. Historians estimate their numbers at between ten and 20 percent of all slaves brought in bondage to America. He analyzes the subsequent impact of Islamic practices on African American worship and music, although, as other studies have noted, slave-master repression ultimately extinguished Islamic belief among American slaves. Similarly examining the American founding, Hussain also concludes that Founding Father Thomas Jefferson "owning a copy of the Quran and reading it is crucial to my argument that Islam is part of the history of America." He "began learning Arabic in the 1770s, after he purchased a translation of the Quran in 1765," namely the 1734 English translation of the Quranic Arabic by English Orientalist George Sale. "It was this Quran that Keith Ellison used when he was sworn in as the first Muslim member of Congress in 2007," Hussain enthuses. "To be clear, Jefferson was no fan of Islam," Hussain writes, and Sale's Quran offers reasons why. Sale's introductory essay describes Islam as "so manifest a forgery" that has motivated "calamities brought on so many nations by the conquests of the Arabians." Hussain also notes President Jefferson's campaigns against North Africa's Muslim Barbary pirates; thus the founding of the modern American Navy is connected to the Muslim world. The worlds of entertainment and sports loom large in Hussain's assessment of Islam in America. Therefore he dedicates his book to Ahmet Ertegun and to Muhammad Ali, perhaps the two American Muslims with the greatest global influence. While Ali dominated the boxing ring, Ertegun was president and cofounder of Atlantic Records and the chairman of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a man who shaped the music of the twentieth century. A strange Muslim role model, Ertegun's biographies say almost nothing about piety, but note his elite background as a diplomat's son who came to America when his father was Turkey's ambassador. Using a truly broad definition of "Muslim," Hussain concedes that Ertegun "wasn't a good Muslim." He lived the high life, was a bon vivant, drank, partied to excess, and had numerous affairs. Ertegun himself noted in a 2005 interview that he "used to

drink a bottle of vodka a day, every day, for about 40 years. Meanwhile, Hussain unconvincingly concludes that Muhammad Ali's life gave the lie to the "problem" that "Islam is comprised of adherents who are violent, un-American, and a threat to our nation." Hussain quotes Ali, who began his Muslim spiritual journey as a member of the rabidly anti-Semitic Nation of Islam (NOI) in 1964, refusing in 1967 military service during the Vietnam War. "We don't take part in Christian wars or wars of any unbelievers," Ali stated, subordinating moral questions of patriotic duty and just war to pure Islamic sectarianism. Although Ali moderated later in life as he moved away from the NOI towards more mainstream Islamic practice, he had a particularly conflicted relationship with Jews. His 1969 statement to television interviewer David Frost that "all Jews and gentiles are devils" foreshadowed a series of anti-Semitic/anti-Israel statements. By contrast, Ali developed friendships with Jews such as comedian Billy Crystal and sportscaster Howard Cosell, and attended the 2012 bar mitzvah of a grandson born to Ali's daughter and her Jewish husband. Hussain also profiles American professional basketball player Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, who reflected Ali's less than all-American behavior. Abdul-Rauf received a playing suspension in 1996 after he refused to stand before games for the national anthem. In a 2016 interview, he stated that as a Muslim, "I don't believe in giving my allegiance to anyone or anything but God," and that the American flag represents "tyranny and oppression." The NOI and its bizarre offshoot cult, the Five Percenters, present more radicalism, yet Hussain's analysis of their influence upon American rappers such as Ice Cube shows little concern. His past praise for the NOI exhibited an antisemitism often present in hip-hop music but ignored by Hussain. He likewise ignores Ice Cube's lax understanding of Islam; Ice Cube stated in a 2000 interview that "going to the mosque, the ritual and the tradition, it's just not in me to do. So I don't do it." More appealing is Hussain's description of the Muslim engineer from Bangladesh, Fazlur Rahman Khan, who "helped to redefine the American skyline" with design innovations that helped build the World Trade Center. "It was foreign Muslims, nineteen hijackers, who took down those buildings. But it was an American Muslim, Fazlur Rahman Khan, who made those magnificent buildings possible in the first place." Yet as in the case of Ertegun, little Islamic faith appears in the biography of Khan, who married an Austrian non-Muslim. According to his daughter, he enjoyed "traveling and meeting people of different cultures and different backgrounds, listening to music, reading widely, from existentialism to writings about beauty, and learning about art." Hussain's book

ultimately reveals more about how America made various individuals from Muslim backgrounds rather than how Hussain's Muslims, who often have Madonna's depth of piety, made America. The radicalism displayed by various Muslims profiled by Hussain affirms his observation that Islam often was an alternative to White or Western in African American movements. Alienated by American racism, these movements often sought false redemption in Islam from historic sins like slavery. In contrast, the Egyptian-American Ahmed Zewail, whom Hussain praises for winning a Nobel Prize in chemistry, valued America's merits in a 2009 interview. "What America has given me is a system of appreciation and opportunity, and that is what we are lacking in the Muslim world. If I had stayed in Egypt, I would not have been able to do what I have done."

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