

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Understanding the Muslim community in America

By Douglas Kindschi

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I will be heading to Detroit for the annual convention of the Islamic Society of North America this weekend.

A rabbi and I will join 20,000 Muslims expected to attend, along with 10 Jewish and Christian seminarians from around the country.

In preparation for this experience, we have been reading a book by Edward Curtis IV, "Muslims in America: A Short History." Even though I have been working on interfaith topics for a few years now, I find there



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faith who have been a part of American history. In the early 1700s, decades before the American Revolution, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, a Muslim fluent in Arabic, was captured and brought to North America from Senegal as a slave. He was the first of about 100,000 Muslims who came here as slaves.

still is much to learn. Let me share with you some insights from this book.

It is good to be reminded of persons of the Islamic faith who have been a part of American history. In the early 1700s, decades before the American Revolution, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, a Muslim fluent in Arabic, was captured and brought to North America from Senegal as a slave. He was the first of about 100,000 Muslims who came here as slaves.

In the early 1900s, Muslim immigrants settled in North Dakota, Iowa, Seattle and Detroit. Great effort was made by these immigrants to fit into American culture as exemplified by the Islamic Center in Toledo, Ohio. The Center "celebrated American patriotism and cultural integration ... recognized the validity of other faiths, supported the brotherhood of all, and opposed discrimination based on language, nation or race."

The immigration law of 1965 banning racial discrimination led to more than 1 million Muslims coming to America from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well

as the Middle East. The Islamic Society of North America traces back to a meeting of Muslim student associations held in 1963 at the University of Illinois.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, there were hundreds of Muslim leaders and organizations that denounced terrorism. Ingrid Mattson, a Hartford Seminary professor, Muslim leader and former ISNA president, said Muslims have the "greatest duty to stop violence committed by Muslims against innocent non-Muslims in the name of Islam" and denounced "Muslim states that thwart democracy, repress women, use the Quran to justify

un-Islamic behavior and encourage violence."

Many other examples of Muslim leaders and organizations condemning terrorism and religious extremism are cited in the book. Unfortunately, such actions are rarely reported by the media. It is sad one pastor of a tiny nondenominational church in Florida can threaten to burn the Quran, and that becomes news around the world. It also is sad much of the world sees America in such a light, just as it is unfortunate that we so often have our impressions formed by the actions of extremist groups.

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