

# I S L A M I C HORIZONS



## THE CHALLENGE AND THE RELIEF

Learning During the Pandemic



## Cover Story

- 20 The Challenge and the Relief
- 23 Learning in an Impersonal Life
- 24 Learning in the Time of Corona: A Parent's Perspective
- 26 Day 239 Since School Closed
- 28 An Uncertain Future?
- 30 Assessing Success in U.S. Islamic Schools

## ISNA Matters

- 8 Building Centers for Positive Youth Development

## Environment

- 16 ISNA Leads Muslim Environmental Engagement

## Op-ed

- 18 Thomas Jefferson, Unitarianism and Islam

## Islam in America

- 34 A Seat at the Table of American Democracy
- 36 Connected by Faith

## Making a Difference

- 38 When All Hope Seems Lost

## Religion

- 40 *Nafs*: Ego, Self or Personality



32

## Bridging the Gap



56

## Coping with Covid-19

## Opinion

- 41 Issues of Poverty in the U.S. Have Solutions
- 43 Who is to Blame for This Country's Economic Decline?

## Interfaith

- 44 Improving Faith Coexistence in Emerging Digital Space

## Family Life

- 46 The World Turned Upside Down
- 48 Teaching and Sharing Islam with Mercy

## Health

- 50 Racial Health Care Disparities in the U.S.
- 52 The Organ Thieves
- 54 A Pandemic of Health Care Inequities
- 58 Do You Want to Better Survive This and Future Pandemics?

## In Memoriam

- 57 Laleh Bakhtiar

## Muslims Under Siege

- 60 The United Nations: After 75 Years of Existence, is it Worth Anything?

## Departments

- 6 Editorial
- 10 Community Matters
- 62 New Releases

# Need a New Resolve

2020 WAS A YEAR OF CHALLENGES, deprivations and blessings.

God will withdraw the pandemic, for our Prophet Muhammad (*salla allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) has stated that God has appointed a cure for every disease except old age (Abu Dawud).

Supremacism, born of Satan's refusal to bow before Adam because he was a "superior creation," continues to thrive everywhere. Many people cannot comprehend that Muslims and others have been forced to seek refuge in the West because their homelands have been looted, plagued by proxy wars and — except for the elites — cannot escape poverty. Asking immigrants to love it or leave it is no different than asking people to eat cake if they can't find bread.

Supremacism did not end after King Leopold II of Belgium had slaughtered 10 million Congolese, with the defeat of Nazism, with the stopping of Serbian massacres of Bosnians, or with the destruction of Iraq, Libya and other Muslim-majority states. Refuting their continued claims of having the moral high ground, the perpetrators of these crimes and their descendants continue to benefit from long-ago injustices. For instance, 14 African countries have been paying off their colonial debt to France since 1961, to the tune of depositing 85% of their foreign reserves into Banque de France, the state treasury.

Today, France and Austria protect supremacism and anti-Islam views under the guise of "defending the freedom of expression." A commonly heard supremacist refrain is that they are preserving the "Western way of life." History reveals just what this "way of life" is — shedding Muslim and Third World blood, destroying and/or ending countless lives, seizing lands and resources when their owners are prostrate.

Instead of arguing among ourselves about the proper response to such provocations, we need to look at the real issue: ongoing colonialism, regardless of what we call it today. Some Muslims urge silence, taking verses, hadiths and historical events out of context; writer and poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox (d. 1919) said, "To sin in silence while others

doth protest makes cowards out of men. ... Therefore I do protest against the boast / Of independence in this mighty land" (<https://poets.org/poem/protest>).

Our silence won't stop the Islamophobes from using the innumerable poison arrows in their quivers to put us in our "proper" place.

Interestingly, the supposed interfaith community doesn't have much to say.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria suffer through proxy wars; roughly 70,000 Pakistanis have died through incessant bomb and drone strikes; Palestine is being forced into nonexistence; European Muslims are being hounded; Kashmiris and Muslim Indians are being hammered into nonentities; and Muslims in Myanmar, Xinjiang, and other Muslim-minority countries find their continued existence threatened.


This election cycle we again heard the familiar call of "Vote for the lesser evil." But who can any longer determine who the "lesser evil" is and what policies it will follow?

Muslims, especially those who have been blessed to make hajj, must stone three pillars that represent the small, medium and larger Satans (evils). Of course they remember that even lesser evils are unacceptable. We see how these evils have (and continue to) bring them nothing but death, destruction and loss of much, in not all, that they value.

Does anyone wonder why Muslims allow all of this to continue?

This year's West Coast Education Forum, held each January, will be virtual. In this issue we inform our community of how its school administrators, teachers, parents and students have adapted.

We also look into how the U.S. health system has and continues to treat Black and minority-Americans differently.

It is opportune to remind physicians that as they don their white coats, graduating medical students take an oath that combines the idea of "do no harm" with vows to remember the social and financial well-being of those upon whom they place stethoscopes. The pandemic has stripped away all the rhetoric, platitudes and assertions. We can no longer claim ignorance. 

**PUBLISHER**

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

**PRESIDENT**

Safaa Zazour

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Basharat Saleem

**EDITOR**

Omer Bin Abdullah

**EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD**

Iqbal Unus, Chair: M. Ahmadullah Siddiqi, Milia Islam-Majeed

**ISLAMIC HORIZONS**

is a bimonthly publication of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

P.O. Box 38

Plainfield, IN 46168-0038

Copyright ©2020

All rights reserved

Reproduction, in whole or in part, of this material in mechanical or electronic form without written permission is strictly prohibited.

Islamic Horizons magazine is available electronically on

ProQuest's Ethnic NewsWatch, Questia.com, LexisNexis, and EBSCO Discovery Service, and is indexed by Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature.

Please see your librarian for access.

The name "Islamic Horizons" is protected through trademark registration  
ISSN 8756-2367

**POSTMASTER**

Send address changes to  
Islamic Horizons, P.O. Box 38  
Plainfield, IN 46168-0038

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Annual, domestic – \$24

Canada – US\$30

Overseas airmail – US\$60

**TO SUBSCRIBE**

Contact Islamic Horizons at

(317) 839-8157 / (317) 204-0187

Fax (317) 839-1840

E-mail: [membership@isna.net](mailto:membership@isna.net)

**ADVERTISING**

For rates contact Islamic Horizons at  
(703) 742-8108, E-mail [horizons@isna.net](mailto:horizons@isna.net),  
[www.isna.net](http://www.isna.net)

To subscribe, please e-mail:

[membership@isna.net](mailto:membership@isna.net)

**CORRESPONDENCE**

Send all correspondence and/or Letters to the

Editor at: Islamic Horizons

P.O. Box 38 • Plainfield, IN 46168-0038

Email: [horizons@isna.net](mailto:horizons@isna.net)

# A Seat at the Table of American Democracy

*Imam W. Deen Mohammed and the Carter White House: A Model for Engagement*

IRSHAD ABDAL-HAQQ



▲ Imam Mohammed was greeted by President Carter in the Roosevelt Room of the White House during his 1977 meeting with Black leaders. (Courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, an institution that is a part of the National Archives and Records Administration)

**W** DEEN MOHAMMED (1933-2008) WAS THE FIRST IMAM TO RECITE and provide a commentary on Quranic verses, the first being 5:69, at a Presidential Inaugural Interfaith Prayer Service. He did so first on Jan. 20, 1993, following Bill Clinton's initial election as president, and again in 1995, following his reelection. During the first interfaith event, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Taylor Branch said in his "The Clinton Tapes" (2009) that he was pleasantly surprised by the imam's involvement and remarked, "I considered [Imam Mohammed] the nation's most underappreciated religious figure in the twentieth century..." (p. 24)

Clinton later recruited the imam as a consultant to the advisory board of his initiative on race: One America in the 21st Century.

More than 15 years earlier, however, Imam Mohammed had participated in an equally historic White House event hosted by President Jimmy Carter on Dec. 14, 1977. A year after the 1976 presidential election, a coalition of prominent Black leaders that called themselves the Black Leadership Forum prevailed upon Carter to grant them an audience to address the socio-economic issues plaguing Blacks, other minorities and the poor.

The Black vote, including the first-time vote of tens of thousands of Black

American Muslims, had been critical to Carter's successful campaign. Thus, representatives of 14 major Black organizations thought it appropriate to request a meeting with him — he ultimately agreed. The process leading up to that meeting, the specific agenda items discussed and his administration's post-meeting relationship with Imam Mohammed's organization may prove instructive for engaging with the administration of any president.

In 1977 Imam Mohammed, whose organization was then called the World Community of Al-Islam in the West (WCIW), had been included in Ebony Magazine's highly anticipated annual list of the "100 Most Influential Black Americans" for three years running. At that time, the WCIW had more than 100 affiliated mosques nationwide, tens of thousands of members, extensive property holdings and other assets. The imam's outreach activities and prominence as head of the WCIW justified inviting him to sit at the table of Black leaders scheduled to meet with the president. He graciously agreed to do so.

The imam's recognition as a representative of the Black community was not based solely on his position as the WCIW's head. Scores of leaders of large Black organizations had not been included. In the case of the imam, however, he had demonstrated his sincere interest in addressing Black socio-economic and other concerns and by reaching out to other Black leaders for nearly a year prior to the meeting in an effort to identify and implement viable solutions to these ongoing problems.

"I do not know if I will be successful or not, but I am going to ask our leaders to come together in an emergency meeting because our condition is just that bad," he said early in the winter of 1977. "I am issuing a national call for survival to all concerned leaders and all concerned citizens of America. We are in the process of forming a group of such persons from all segments of society who are ready to mobilize their forces against the common enemies of our communities," he added. (Bilalian News, Jan. 20, 1978, p. 4).

By early November 1977, more than a dozen prominent Black leaders had met twice during the year to discuss strategies for addressing the crisis of unemployment and additional serious issues affecting Black Americans and others. Despite their philosophical, religious and/or political differences, these leaders adopted a unified strategy for accessing the power of the White House. They built their solidarity upon an agenda of common concerns. Some of them had publicly rebuked the Carter administration for failing to aggressively seek solutions to the problems they were trying to address and accused him of failing to live up to his campaign promises. So they agreed to request a meeting with him.

Perhaps the most critical voice was that of Vernon E. Jordan Jr. (executive director, National Urban League [NUL]), who served as the group's spokesperson. "The



◀ *Imam Mohammed (seated right rear) in attendance at President Carter's meeting with Black leaders, Nov. 4, 1977. (Courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.)*

“I CONSIDERED [IMAM MOHAMMED] THE NATION'S MOST UNDERAPPRECIATED RELIGIOUS FIGURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY...,” TAYLOR BRANCH, “THE CLINTON TAPES” (P. 24)

Administration has formulated a new foreign policy, a new defense policy and a new energy policy. But it has not adequately addressed itself to a new domestic policy,” he alleged in his keynote NUL convention address in July 1977. “We have no full employment policy. We have no welfare reform policy. We have no national health policy. We have no urban revitalization policy. We have no aggressive affirmative action policy. We have no national solution to the grinding problems of poverty and discrimination.”

Ebony Magazine’s “Annual Progress Report for 1977” was equally critical. It said that Carter’s inauguration had provided a glimmer of hope, but that this hope faded to despair by mid-1977 as his unexpectedly conservative administration had begun to neglect the Black community.

For his part, Carter believed that too much was being asked of him in such a short time. “I have been in office now six months, have no apologies to make...” He asserted that the problems he was expected to address had existed for many years before his tenure and could not be quickly resolved. Nonetheless, he granted Jordan’s request for a meeting.

In addition to Imam Mohammed and Jordan, among the other attending dignitaries were Rep. Parren J. Mitchell (D, chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus), Dorothy T. Height, Coretta Scott King and Jesse Jackson. Among the issues they raised were expanding job programs to remedy high unemployment, developing an overall urban policy supported by sufficient funding and reorganizing the civil rights agencies.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the delegation’s general consensus, as expressed by Jordan, was that President Carter seemed personally committed to

helping the unemployed and poor. Nevertheless, overall they were skeptical because he did not commit to including sufficient funding in the federal budget to support programs that would address their concerns. This prompted one leader to propose taking their concerns to Congress rather than rely solely on the White House’s doubtful cooperation in terms of budget increases.

Imam Mohammed, however, expressed strong satisfaction with the outcome. (Bilalian News, Dec. 30, 1977, p.3).

Thus, while it is undeniable that a seat at the table of democracy is desirable, that, in and of itself, is not enough. After discussing concerns and obtaining assurances of support from a president or other powerful politicians, there must be follow-up and follow through.

In the above case, the follow-up partially consisted of revamping the minority business assistance program operated by the U.S. Commerce Department’s Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE) to assist more minority businesses. For Imam Mohammed and the

WCIW, follow-up involved establishing a robust relationship with OMBE based on information it shared with Black leaders during the White House meeting. Ultimately, this led to an OMBE-WCIW 1978 initiative in the Chicago area to support programs designed to benefit minority communities. This initiative culminated in the award of a January 1979 Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) food supply contract, bolstered by U.S. Commerce Department loan guarantees, to the American Pouch Foods Company, Inc. (APF) — a joint venture between the WCIW’s Chicago-based Progressive Land Developers, Inc. and APF International, Inc., an Asian-American firm.

Valued at up to \$35 million (\$133 million in current value when adjusted for inflation), the APF project was touted for having the potential of creating hundreds of future jobs for the urban poor. Unfortunately, and through no fault of the imam and WCIW, which had only contributed land and buildings, DLA terminated the contract after less than two years due to APF’s alleged failure to meet production schedules.

Notwithstanding this action, an examination of Imam Mohammed’s approach for engaging with the Carter administration is instructive. He encouraged forming and then joined a coalition of non-Muslim Black organizations and individuals who shared some of his socio-economic and moral concerns. Along with them, he approached and engaged Carter, and subsequently his administration, to pursue a community development project. He did not simply sit at the table and request government funding; rather, he brought something to the table — an economic development project that required shared risk, but which would reap shared success in the form of job opportunities — an objective toward which all parties aspired.

In the current political climate, perhaps Muslim Americans can employ part or all of Imam Mohammed’s strategy for engaging with the White House. This would involve partnering with one another as well as with non-Muslim organizations on matters of mutual concern, thereby claiming our seat at the table of democracy, bringing something of concrete value (e.g., proposed projects requiring investments on our part), following up on our expressed objectives and, finally, following through by executing a viable action plan to achieve them. *ih*

Irshad Abdal-Haqq, a writer and attorney, pens fiction and nonfiction that focus on issues of importance to Muslims and Black Americans and marginalized communities on “Irshad’s Blog” (Abdal-Haqq.com). He is the author of the newly released short story collection, “Dash: Young Black Refugee and Migration Stories.” He also contributes to #MuslimLivesMatter and #BlackLivesMatter.