

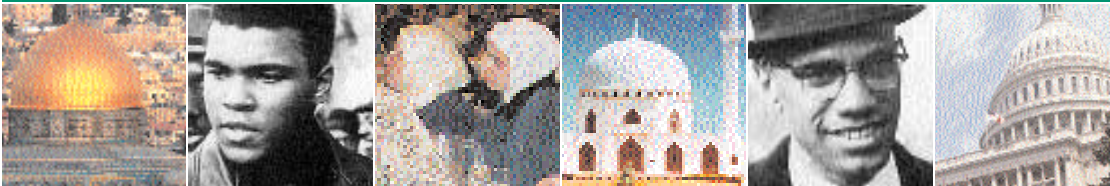
# PROJECT

# MAPS

## Muslims in American Public Square

Summer 2001

Newsletter of the Project MAPS  
[www.projectmaps.com](http://www.projectmaps.com)



## Muslim Leadership Focus Group: A Unique and Historical Event

**Twenty-Five national leaders discuss critical issues facing American Muslims today**

BY FAISAL AHMED MATADAR

Project MAPS held a focus group of national-level Muslim leadership on May 9, 2001 at Georgetown University Conference Center. It was declared by the participants, "a unique and historical moment in the history of Islam in America". Twenty-five national leaders, representing all shades of the ethno-religious horizon of the Muslim community, vigorously discussed the critical issues facing the American Muslims today. Ten commissioned scholars also observed the daylong proceedings, which were facilitated by Professor M. A. Siddiqi. In the beginning, Prof. John Esposito made his opening remarks, while Prof. Sulayman Nyang and Dr. Zahid Bukhari apprised the participants of the project activities.

Some of the issues discussed by the national leadership were the following: Implications for Muslims living in a pluralistic society; Unity among diverse Muslim organizations; Extent of Muslim Women participa-

tion in the civic life; American Muslims' political strategy and the impact of international crises on American Muslims.

A dinner reception followed the focus group, in which more than one hundred Muslim leaders of the Washington DC metro area joined the national Muslim leadership. Moderated by Dr. Zahid Bukhari, representatives of many of the invited organizations gave brief comments about the project and their own activities. Many expressed their appreciation to Project MAPS for hosting such an event, noting that it was the first time that almost all of the leaders were able to meet and discuss the condition of Muslims in North America in an informal setting.

Following dinner, Prof. Sulayman Nyang addressed the audience, summarizing the points discussed over the course of the day. He began by noting that the "myth of return" has been discarded by Muslims, and is non-existent amongst the younger generations. It was also pointed out that with this intention to reside in America, comes a serious responsibility. Prof. Nyang also highlighted the resemblance of the situation of the American Muslims to the situation of the first Muslim emigrants to the city of Medina.

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## Why the Public Square?

The public square is not only the physical space that holds us together outside our private homes, but also the metaphorical symbol that represents the actuality and potentiality of civil society.

BY SULAYMAN S. NYANG



**Sulayman S. Nyang** is a professor of African Studies at Howard University, Washington, DC, and co-principal investigator of the Project MAPS

The Muslim Americans seem to have to come of age in America. Finally, the nation's leaders and media have added them to the list of ethnic and religious minorities whose problems and conditions warrant conversational or literary discourse. This growing interest and coverage in the media has led many scholars, journalists and ordinary citizens to ask: Who are these Muslims and how are they going to fit into the larger American political and cultural context? These questions are part of the larger focus of the Project MAPS: Muslims in the American Public Square, based at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding in the School of Foreign Service of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. This study, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, is part of a larger Pew initiative: "Religion in the American Public Square" that will examine Muslim, Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical Christian, African American Christian, Hispanic Christian and Jewish communities. Each such study will be the work of researchers and scholars drawn primarily from that community.

In contemporary American religious discourse the term "Public Square" has come to denote that social space in which the ordinary human being interacts with other members of society outside his

family life. Such a field of activity encompasses a wide range of human events that bring together members of various faith communities in the United States of America. It also serves as a theater where social, moral, intellectual and cultural challenges to our common humanity are played out and settled. The public square, one can argue, is the sphere where men and women are called upon to speak the language of civility and to compete in the doing of good as the Qur'an clearly states in Suratul Mulk: The One Who created death and life, so that He may put you to test, to find out which of you is best in deeds: He is the All-Mighty, the All-forgiving (67:2). In other words, the public square is not only the physical space that holds us together outside our private homes, but also the metaphorical symbol that represents the actuality and potentiality of civil society. For those of us living in the United States where the doctrine of separation of church and state is widely embraced, the public square is that domain of life where Man and Woman are free to articulate and replicate socially and publicly how and what they feel privately without incurring the wrath of a state bent on imposing a dogma or suffering at the hands of a bigoted religious rival. In the coming issues of this newsletter the activi-

ties and experiences of American Muslims in the Public Square will be the subject of discourse. Both the positive and the negative aspects of this experience will receive our attention.

The Muslim Americans are broadly classified as immigrants and native-born. These sociological categories are heuristic devices that help us understand our mental and physical fields of operation. Within a single family one finds immigrant parents fathering and mothering native-born children. These second-generation children have much in common with children of native-born Muslim Americans who have spent their entire lives in the United States. Because of these sociological realities and differences within the larger Muslim community in the country, it is imperative for the Muslim leaders at the national, state and local levels to pay greater attention to the challenges and opportunities in the Public Square. The Muslim American community is a microcosm of Global Islam. This is to say; when we take stock of our diversity we find that alphabetically our membership ranges from Albanians, Afghans and Algerians at one end to Yemenis and Zanzibaris on the other. Between these two ends of the alphabetical spectrum are the Arabs, Bengalis, Bosnians, Caribbean, Chinese, Indians, Indonesians, Iranians, Lebanese, Pakistanis, Palestinians, Senegalese, Sudanese, Somalis and Turks. Our diversity is not only evident in our national origins but also in the *Madhabian* and *Tariqian* differences that historically fragmented our communities. What is comforting to some of us is the

fact that here in the United States many of these old differences are beginning to lose their divisive powers and a new sense of Muslim solidarity is in the making. Such solidarity can develop only when the Public Square is used by Muslims to explain the nature and complexities of their faith to fellow Americans while acknowledging the diversity of opinions both inside and outside their community.

These are the fruits of a liberal democracy, a society where no individual and no single group capture the state to the point of dictating to others the contents of their beliefs and the manner in which to lead their lives. In this context, one should add that the Public Square does not have to evolve into a moral and spiritual jungle where everything and anything go. The morality that shapes the conduct of men and women in

society and the language of discourse between civilized humanity could derive much inspiration and stimulation from the scriptures that bind the members of the faith communities of our country. This is the view of Muslims who believe the Qur'an provides them with a moral compass to navigate the stormy waters of life. Let us enter the Public Square and join our fellow citizens in the moral and spiritual education of America. ♦



## Glitterati of Academia on MAPS

Project MAPS has assembled an Advisory Board comprising of some of the leading scholars on Islam and Muslims in the United States. The Board includes Dr. Taha Jaber Alalwani, President of the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences, Leesburg, VA; Dr. Vincent Cornell, director of King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AK; Dr. John L. Esposito, University Professor and Director, Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, Washington, DC; Dr. Ali A. Mazrui, Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, State University of New York, Binghamton, NY; Dr. Akbar Muhammad, professor, department of history, State University of New York at Binghamton, NY, and Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, University Professor at George Washington University, Washington, DC.

The board serves to provide expertise, guidance, feedback, and overall supervision of the pro-

ject. All Board members attended the first meeting held on November 8, 1999 at Georgetown University, where Prof. Nyang and Dr. Bukhari introduced the project. The members discussed different theoretical and applied aspects of the proposed volumes, offering their enthusiastic support and cooperation for this project.

Dr. Kimon Sargeant from the Religion Program of the Pew Charitable Trusts, who also participated in the meeting, spoke on the \$10 million Pew initiative that envisages studying and examining the religious communities and the American Public Square.

Prof. John Voll, Prof. Yvonne Haddad, and Prof. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, faculty members of the Center for Muslim Christian Understanding, and the first Muslim Chaplain of Georgetown University, Imam Yahya Hendi also joined the public session of the meeting. Later, Dr. John Galluci, Dean of the School of Foreign Affairs, Georgetown University, also met with the board members.

*(from left to right)*

**Prof. Sulayman Nyang, Dr. Zahid Bukhari, Dr. Vincent Cornell, Prof. Akbar Muhammad, Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr; Prof. John Esposito, Dr. Taha Jaber Alwani; Prof. Ali Mazrui, Prof. Yvonne Haddad and Dr. Kimon Sargeant**

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## Leadership Focus Group ...

In referring to the exchange between the various leaders throughout the meetings, Prof. Nyang described the climate as open and candid. Of the many issues tackled, he summarized the discussions of a few. The condition and future of Muslim youth and their socialization was seen as critical to the continued success and development of the community. The transfer of leadership to the youth at all organizational levels was also considered important.

Prof. Nyang related that the leaders dealt with the issue of gender ethics and participation with maturity and rationality. Attempts to connect the present situation with the first Muslim community were made, along with points about participation without cultural baggage. The leaders were also alerted to the importance of finding a balance between partici-



ipation and a defense against the radical feminism of the present times.

He reported that the leaders also saw the need for a balance in terms of concern and attention paid to domestic and international issues. He pointed out that various national magazines and publications are showing this balance, as both areas are often reported on. This led into a discussion concerning political participation on the part of Muslims in America. Some of the points mentioned included the need

for greater grassroots mobilization, increased coordination amongst the leadership, and attention to issues that cut across the entire Muslim community.

A general theme highlighted by Prof. Nyang was the position that Muslims in America can play in terms of the moral betterment of American society. He described it by noticing a

significant irony: that the Muslims, as a new group in the American Public Square, have the ability to defend the old American values that are disappearing, the result of which is manifest. He, as well as all of the various speakers, hoped that the meeting would be a stepping-stone for increased coordination within the leadership, until the day when, as one leader put it, "the leadership will have become so close that they will finish each others' sentences." ♦



## Leadership Conference Participants

### Muslim American Society (MAS)

Imam W. D. Mohammed  
Imam Yusuf Saleem  
Rafah Muhammed  
Sr. Amatullah Sharief

### Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

Dr. Muzammil Siddiqui  
Shaikh Abdalla Idris Ali

### Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)

Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah  
Dr. Mohammad Yunus  
Naeem Baig

### Al-Khoy Foundation, New York

Shaikh Fadil Sahlani

### Muslim Community of Imam Jamil Al-Amin

Imam Asim Abdur Rashid

### Muslim American Society (MAS)

Dr. Souhail Ghannouchi  
Sheikh Shaker Elsayed

### Muslim Alliance in North America (MANA)

Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid  
Dr. Ihsan Bagby  
Amir Al-Islam

### Islamic Center of America, Detroit

Imam Hassan Qazwini

### American Muslim Council (AMC)

Dr. Yahya Mossa-Basha  
Aly R. Abuzaakouk

### American Muslim Alliance (AMA)

Dr. Agha Saeed  
Eric Vickers

### Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Nihad Awad  
Dr. Mohammed Nimer

### Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)

Salam Al-Marayati

### Muslim Students Association of US & Canada (MSA)

Altaf Husain

### Islamic Assembly of North America

Their leadership could not

attend but they faxed a letter of support for the project.

### Observers

Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari  
Dr. Ghulam N. Nabi  
Dr. M. Salem Omesh  
Prof. Yvonne Haddad  
Prof. Jane Smith  
Imam Yahya Hendi

### Project MAPS

Prof. John L. Esposito  
Prof. Sulayman S. Nyang  
Prof. Muhammad A. Siddiqui  
Dr. Zahid H. Bukhari  
Farrukh Raza  
Ayub Alam



## Regional Seminars, Focus Groups

**M**uslim Americans should take the next major step of working for the overall betterment of the American people, becoming the champion of social justice for all segments of the society. To achieve this objective, the Muslim organizations should form selective alliances with other ethno-religious groups on various issues of concern was one of the main messages delivered by the participants of the Regional Seminars and Focus Group organized by the Project MAPS in Washington, DC, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta.

More than 300 Muslim leaders and Imams of Islamic centers/mosques of greater Washington, DC area, Chicago, Detroit, New York, New Jersey, Los Angeles, San Jose, Atlanta and representatives of national and public advocacy organizations participated in the regional seminars and focus groups. Professor Sulayman Nyang and Dr. Zahid Bukhari, co-principal investigators of the project, facilitated these seminars that were also attended by some of the scholars working with the project.

The participants focused on five aspects of Muslim involvement in the American Public Square.

- Living as a Muslim in a pluralistic society
- Evolving role of Islamic centers/mosques
- Impact of gender, ethnic and generational differences
- Institutional response of the Muslim community in setting a national agenda
- Struggle for international issues and its impact on the domestic arena

The participants expressed satisfaction on the successes achieved by the Muslim community in the last three decades, however, they also pointed out that the Muslim Americans have still to go far in their struggle to be fully recognized in the American Public Square. Symbolic contacts with the American officials and institutions are a welcome sign, but now the debate should be started on the issues and concerns of the Muslim community. Muslims should try to achieve the status

when the input from the Muslim leadership would be included in the policymaking process of government institutions.

The meeting brought forth several issues concerning Muslim life in the United States. It was stressed that Muslims are facing challenges as well as opportunities in America and they could meet the new situation only with the guidance from the Qur'an and Sunnah. The participants also expressed their reservation on the use of terms like American Islam or Americanization of Islam.

It was stated that the major Islamic centers and campuses are opening new windows of opportunities for the Muslim communities all across U.S., not only a place of worship and Islamic training but also as hubs of sociopolitical and Da'wah activities. The Islamic centers/Masjids are, however, also facing several problems, such as lack of management and accountability of the leadership; and the lack of those Islamic scholars who have good grasp of the American system is also a grave problem. Thus the Masjids have become merely community service institutions.

The second-generation youth and their Islamic education and upbringing were mentioned as the most serious issues of the American Muslim community. The Muslim youth should be included into the leadership role at local, regional and national levels. If proper training and Islamic education were not arranged for them, the youth would be attracted to different extreme political and religious trends.

The participants also cautioned on the emerging divide of wealth among various Muslim communities, especially among immigrants and Afro-American Muslims. There is a need to address this cleavage. All Muslims, regardless of their fiqhi and ethnic differences, should learn to encourage internal pluralism and also develop a model of working together.

The participants appreciated the scope of the project and its approach of initiating active discussion between scholars and the community leaders on the vital issues related to the role of

*More than 300 Muslim leaders and Imams of Islamic centers/mosque, representatives of national and public advocacy organizations, and some of the scholars working with the project participated in the regional seminars and focus groups.*

## Project Activities

With its focus on the challenging issues facing the Muslims community today, Project MAPS will fill an important gap in the available literature on Islam, Muslims and their participation in the civic life of the larger American society. During its three-year period (1999-2002), the project will accomplish the following:

■ **Publish two scholarly volumes:** Approximately thirty scholars will examine key aspects of the Muslim community's engagement in American life and their papers will be published in two edited volumes.

■ **Prepare and produce two major reference tools:** The project will publish two valuable reference tools:

1) Directory of Muslim Civic Organizations and Centers/Mosques, and  
2) Who's Who Among American Muslims.

■ **Conduct a national survey of Muslim communities and leaders:** A two-stage national survey of Islamic centers/mosques, community leaders and Muslim congregants will be conducted

during the second year of the project to gather data on Islamic organizations and the views of Muslim leaders and citizens.

■ **Host a national conference:** The capstone of the project will be a national conference, to be held in Washington, DC, in the third year of the project, with the theme of "The Muslim Community in the American Public Square: Looking into the New Millennium."

■ **Hold regional workshops and focus groups:** The project will arrange four one-day regional seminars and three focus groups in various cities of the United States. The

purpose of these seminars and focus groups is to bring together scholars and Muslim religious and community leaders so they can exchange their ideas and experiences on Muslim participation in American civic life.

■ **Develop a comprehensive project Web site:** The web site will serve as a search engine, research tool, discussion forum and link to other Internet resources on the Muslim community's civic involvement. It also will provide updated information on the project and connect to other groups in Religious Communities initiative.

## Project MAPS Co-Sponsors Academic Conferences

Project MAPS co-sponsored the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) fifth annual conference on "Islam in America" that was held on June 29 - July 1, 2001 at Indianapolis, IN. Dr. Sayyid M. Syyed, ISNA Secretary General, inaugurated the conference. Prof. Ali Mazrui, Prof. Nyang, Dr. Ihsan Bagy, Dr. Iqbal Unus, Dr. Bukhari and several other scholars presented papers during the three-day conference. Please visit [www.isna.net](http://www.isna.net) for the conference proceedings.

Project MAPS also co-sponsored the "Islam in America, 2001" conference that was held at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA on March 9 - 11, 2001. The theme of the conference was "Domestic Challenges, International Concerns & Historical

Legacies." Prof. Nyang was one of the keynote speakers.

Two panels were also sponsored by the Project: 1) A panel during the 18th annual conference of the American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies (ACSIS) that was held at Villanova University, Villanova, PA on April 27-28, 2001. The panel topic was "Islam, Pluralism and Participation: conceptual discourse and practical concerns." Dr. Bukhari moderated the panel, while Prof. Nyang and Dr. Ghulam N. Fai made presentations. 2) A workshop panel during the 9th National Convention of the American Muslim Council (AMC), held on June 22-25, 2001 in Arlington, VA. Three com-



*Dr. Bukhari, right, at ISNA's fifth annual conference on "Islam in America" with Shafi Khaled, Kareem Irfan, and Iftekhar Hai*

missioned scholars: Prof. Marcia Hermansen, Prof. Aminah McCloud and Dr. Shabbir Mansuri, were among the panelists.

The Project MAPS will also be co-sponsoring the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) thirtieth annual conference to be held on October 26-28, 2001 at University of Michigan, Dearborn, MI. The conference theme will be "Religion and Public Life in the Global Epoch." Several of the commissioned scholars will be presenting their papers in various panels and plenary sessions of the conference.

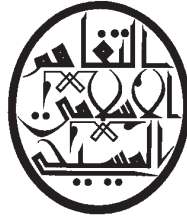
## projectmaps.com

The project website is up and running. Please visit it to be updated about the development and progress of the project. We encourage you to take part in the discussion forums. Looking forward to hear from you. Send us your suggestions on [info@projectmaps.com](mailto:info@projectmaps.com).



## The HOST Institution

The Project MAPS is based at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU), Georgetown University, Washington, DC. The center was founded in 1993 to foster a civilizational dialogue between the Muslim World and the West, Islam and Christianity. As part of the university's famous Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, it attracts students, visiting professors and noted scholars from Middle East, Asia, Europe and America. This international mix generates a cross-cultural view of the world and furthers the Center's mission of dispelling discrimination and prejudice. The Center's founding Director, John L. Esposito is University Professor.



## Who's Who

### Among American Muslim Community

*We need your recommendations!*

One can find voluminous studies, directories, and reference material in public libraries on all other groups of the American ethno-religious mosaic. The resources on the Muslim community, however, are scarce, and if they exist at all, are not readily available.

To address this problem, the Project MAPS has planned, as one of its objectives, to compile a Who's Who among American Muslim Community. The Who is who will include biographical information on about 1000 Muslim civic leaders in America who have achieved prominence and recognition in public affairs, academia, science and technology, corporate world, media, business and commerce, sports and entertainment, and civic organizations. We need your help in collecting names for this important reference tool. Please provide five names at national level and five names in your local area of those Muslim personalities whom you recommend to be included in the Who's Who.

National Level:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Local Area Level:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## West Coast Muslim Perspectives

Project MAPS — Muslims in American Public Square — heard the perspectives of Muslims living in the West Coast when a regional seminar was held in Los Angeles on Nov. 11, 2000.

The seminar brought together some 25 Muslim community leaders, Imams, and scholars from the region. MAPS Principal Researcher Dr. Zahid H. Bukhari said that the seminar focused on the five aspects of the Muslim community's involvement in the American public square. The discussion commenced after an introduction of the Project by Professor Sulayman Nyang, and Dr. Zahid Bukhari.

Muslim community leaders discussed critical issues facing American Muslims in a frank and friendly atmosphere during the one-day seminar. The participants also debated the five sets of issues which were the main focus of the Project MAPS. Dr. Agha Saeed, Executive Director, American Muslim Alliance (AMA) presented a post election analysis, Muslim perspective.

## Muslim Leaders Focus on America

A focus group of Muslim leaders who have been working full-time for the Islamic causes at various Islamic centers and Muslim organizations met on October 21, 2000 at Georgetown University. Dr. M. A. Siddiqui, Professor of Mass Communications and Public Relations, served as facilitator of the focus group that discussed the "Role of the Muslim community and its participation in the American civic life." The participants shared their views on various topics including the role of Islamic centers in America, implications of living in a pluralistic society, the national agenda for Muslims, and participation of Muslim women in American civic life.

## Muslim Youth Seminar

A Muslim youth leadership seminar was held on September 17, 2000 at Georgetown University. The all-day seminar discussed the five sets of issues, which were the focus of the Project MAPS, and brought forth the Muslim youths' point of view. More than 45 Muslim youth leaders participated in the seminar.

## National Survey of Islamic Centers

Project MAPS team is involved in the first stage of the national survey of the Islamic centers/mosques, Islamic schools and Muslim organizations. The objective of the first stage of the survey is to compile an accurate data of existing Islamic centers/masajid/schools/organizations. The collected information will also be helpful in drawing a scientific national sample of the Islamic centers/masajid for the second stage of the survey that will incorporate both individual and institutional participation of Muslims in American civic life. The survey findings will be published in a directory.

COURTESY: IMAM YEHSI ISMAIL

*Albanian Islamic Center  
Harper Woods, Michigan*



Muslims in American Public Square

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