

Black Muslims in the United States: An Introductory Activity

BY ALISON KYSIA

This interactive lesson introduces participants to Black Muslims in U.S. history through a meet-and-greet activity. The lesson empowers participants to combat Islamophobia by sharing stories that challenge unidimensional caricatures of Muslims. The lesson raises up voices we rarely hear in the media when we talk about Islam and Muslims — Black Muslims. The meet-and-greet personalities in this lesson are all African American, which not only helps participants explore Islam in the United States, but also advances themes in Black history.

Racism fuels both our ignorance of Black history and our ignorance of Muslims. Islamophobia does not solely originate in a lack of knowledge about religious beliefs and rituals. Rather, Islamophobia is a consequence of white supremacy and American nativism, ideologies which also champion anti-Black racism.

It is within these intersections, like the intersection of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia, where we can build vocabularies to better understand bigotry in order to defeat it.

Purpose and objectives

In this participant-centered meet-and-greet activity, participants learn about 25 Black Muslims in U.S. history spanning the 17th century (colonization) to the present. This lesson can be used in middle and high school classes, colleges, public dialogue projects, or any other convening of 12 or more people who want to learn about Muslims in U.S. history.

Each participant is given a meet-and-greet role and a half-sheet biography of one Black Muslim in U.S. history. They are given a few minutes to quietly familiarize themselves with their characters. Participants then meet-and-greet one another just like they would at a party, except instead of introducing themselves, they become the Muslim characters. Afterwards, participants break into small groups to discuss questions that will prompt the articulation of key themes:

- Muslims have been present in the United States since the 17th century.
- The first Muslims in the United States were enslaved.

- Black Muslims have addressed injustice and oppression through a variety of creative responses.
- Black Muslims challenge stereotypes of Muslims by representing diverse histories firmly rooted in the United States.
- Black Muslim women have been influential in and committed to the shaping of Islam in the United States, with increasing leadership in the last 50 years.

Materials

- Meet-and-greet role, one for each participant.
 - » If you have fewer than 25 participants, be sure to include the following (so students can answer the worksheet and discussion questions):
 - * Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua
 - * Yarrow Mamout
 - * Margaret Bilali
 - * Clara Muhammad

- * Warith Deen Mohammed
- * Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf
- * Keith Ellison
- * Amina Wadud
- * Aisha Al-Adawiya
- * Yasiin Bey
- * Carolyn Walker-Diallo
- * Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir

- Name tags, one for each participant.
- Meet-and-greet worksheet, one for each participant.
- Discussion questions handout, one for each participant.

Time required

50-75 minutes

Suggested procedure

1. Explain the following: We hear a lot in the media about Muslims, but they are often represented as being from somewhere else, that Islam is from somewhere else, and that “they” are different than “us.” This lesson is going to help us learn more about the role that Muslims and Islam have played in U.S. history by sharing the stories of 25 Black Muslims who were alive between 1600 and the present.
2. Ask participants: How many Black Muslims can you name? Make a list on a board or write the list on a piece of paper. This will be helpful later to gauge participant learning.
3. Give each participant one meet-and-greet role. Ask them to read their roles quietly for a few minutes. Circulate around the room and answer any questions participants have about pronunciation or vocabulary.
4. Give each participant a meet-and-greet worksheet. Read the questions out loud together as a group. Explain the following: The worksheet is a tool you can use to gather important information as you meet each other. Later, we will talk more about how the information you collected can help us define key themes in our study of Black Muslims.
5. Explain that participants should “get into character” by walking around the room to meet each other, speaking in the first person, and asking one another questions to learn about each other: “What is your name? Where are you from? Tell me your story.” Remind participants that the roles are based on real people and they should share their character’s life story with respect.
6. Now that they understand what they are doing and what kind of information they are looking for, ask each participant to use the back of the meet-and-greet half-sheet biography to summarize, in five bullet points, the most important information they want to share about their character.
7. Give each participant a name tag and have them write the name of their character on it.
8. Have two participants model the activity for the group.
9. Ask participants to get out of their seats and meet-and-greet one another. Participants should engage in dialogue with the people they meet. They should try and get answers to as many of the questions as they can.
10. After the meet-and-greet is completed (about 25 minutes), hand out the small group discussion questions. Have participants individually reflect on the activity for 2-3 minutes. Then, break participants into groups of 3-4. Participants can use the information they gathered on the worksheet to help answer the discussion questions. Allow small groups to meet for 10-15 minutes.
11. Bring the group back together as a whole to review the discussion questions and allow some participants to share their answers within the time remaining.
12. After the activity is completed, educators should take five minutes and answer the following questions:
 - a. What worked well in this lesson?
 - b. How could this lesson be improved next time?

- c. What additional lessons could I connect to this one to sustain the conversation?
- d. What questions remain?

Alison Kysia has been an educator for 20 years. She is the project director of “Islamophobia: a people’s history teaching guide” at Teaching for Change. She wants to offer special thanks to Margari Aziza Hill, co-founder and co-director of the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative, for her thoughtful feedback on the lesson.

Meet-and-Greet Roles

Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua Ma-home-ma Gar-dough Ba-qwa-qwa

I was born into a Muslim merchant family in Djougou, Benin, on the West coast of Africa, around 1830 (my date of birth is not known). We lived on an important trade route connecting Asante (which would later become the kingdom of Ghana) and the Sokoto Caliphate, both of which were kingdoms in West Africa controlled by Muslim rulers at that time. I attended a Quran school when I was young (known as a madrasa) where I learned to read and write Arabic. Like so many other West Africans, I was enslaved and sold several times, eventually ending up in Brazil, where I was purchased by a Catholic baker who beat me with a whip. Because of the abuse I suffered, I tried to commit suicide but failed. I tried to kill the baker, but failed and was sold to the captain of a ship. He also beat me. When the ship docked in New York, I escaped with the help of the abolitionist organization known as the New York Committee of Vigilance. I supported abolition, or the movement to end slavery, but many white abolitionists also wanted us to go “back to Africa” because they didn’t want us living in their neighborhoods. I moved to Haiti where I converted to Christianity. Why did I convert? I was living in extreme poverty and some Christians offered me a place to live. They paid for me to go to Central College in McGrawville, New York, which empowered me to write my *Biography*, one of the few remaining texts written by a formerly-enslaved Black American Muslim man. After 1857, there are no records of my whereabouts.

Ayuba Suleiman Diallo Eye-you-ba Sool-aye-man Dee-al-low (also known as Job ben Solomon and Ayuba ibn Sulayman)

I was born in 1701 in Bundu, West Africa at the mouth of the Gambia River. In 1730, I was captured and sold into slavery, even though I was part of the upper class and was educated. Ironically, I was enslaved while trying to sell enslaved people. I was Futa (the name of my ethnic group) and I got caught by a Mandingo (another ethnic group). Lots of people think Africans are one people, but we are not and never have been. I ended up in Annapolis, Maryland, after being bought by a man named Mr. Tolsey. I worked on a tobacco plantation on Kent Island, the largest island in the Chesapeake Bay. Because of my privileged upbringing, I had no idea how to farm, which my owner figured out quickly, and I was reassigned to work with the cattle. Soon after I arrived, I escaped but was caught and thrown in jail. I met a powerful white man named Thomas Bluett who eventually wrote a biography of me. After being released from jail, I was returned to Mr. Tolsey and wrote a letter to my father. The letter never reached him, but ended up in the hands of another powerful white man named James Oglethorpe who was the Director of the Royal African Company. He paid for my freedom and sent me to London, where I was able to mingle with rich people due to my own upbringing. I eventually made it back to Gambia in West Africa where I died in my 70s.

Lamine Kaba**La-meen Ka-ba**

(also spelled Lemen Kebe)

There are no records about the year of my birth or death, but I came from Futa Jallon, in what is today the country of Guinea in West Africa. I was born into an ethnic group called the Jakhanke which included many Muslim religious leaders. I could read and write Arabic and learned about Islam from both male and female teachers (one of my aunts was a brilliant educator). I, too, became a religious teacher. One day, while traveling to the coast to get paper for my students, I was kidnapped, sold into slavery, and transported to the United States. I secured my freedom in 1834, in part by converting to Christianity (or so I told people). One reason I may have told people I was Christian was to fool them into giving me the money I needed to emigrate out of the United States. White abolitionists like the American Colonization Society believed in ending slavery, but that didn't mean they wanted to be friends with Black people. That is why they helped me move to Liberia in 1835, after 40 years of enslavement.

Yarrow Mamout**Yar-row Ma-moot**

(also known as Muhammad Yaro)

I was born around 1736 in what is today Guinea, West Africa. Around the age of 16, I was enslaved and sent to work for Samuel Beall in Takoma Park, Maryland. The family freed me in 1796 when I was 60 years old. I am famous because there is a painting of me in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It was painted in 1819 by the American portrait artist Charles William Peale who founded the museum. He wanted to paint my picture because I was out of the ordinary: a formerly enslaved Black Muslim man who owned property at 3324 Dent Place NW in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C. In the Georgetown Branch of the Washington, D.C. Public Library, there is a second painting of me from 1822 by James Alexander Simpson. Granted, while I was able to achieve some impressive successes in my life, don't forget that I was always threatened by the terrorism of slavery. Even though I was "free," a Black man could be kidnapped and enslaved regardless of what his paperwork said. I was known for praying, for not eating pork, and for not drinking alcohol. I died in 1823 at the age of 87.

Umar ibn Saïd
Ou-mar ibin Sa-eed
 (Omar ibn Saïd)

I was born around 1770 in Futa Toro, a Muslim kingdom in what is today northern Senegal in West Africa. After 25 years of education, I was enslaved around 1807 when Bundu, Kaarta, and Khasso (three other Muslim kingdoms) joined forces to invade Futa Toro. I was transported in the torturous conditions of a slave ship to Charleston, South Carolina. I ran away — like many enslaved people — and went to Fayetteville, North Carolina. I went to a church to pray and was arrested. I wrote on the walls of my prison cell and this caught the attention of General James Owen. He bought me because I was an educated man. I converted to Christianity and became quite famous for that — there were a number of newspaper articles written about me. These articles are interesting because the white authors could not make sense of my complicated identity. I was a Black West African Muslim man and yet these authors described me as being a “specimen of white beauty” by equating whiteness with Christianity. Regardless, it did not help me gain my freedom. In 1831, I wrote a short 15-page pamphlet in which I included Arabic verses from the Quran, a description of the horrors of my enslavement, and criticism of Christian justifications for slavery. Was I Muslim or Christian or both? I died at the age of 94.

Abdulrahman Ibrahim ibn Sori
Abdool-rah-mon Ib-ra-heem ibin Sore-ee
 (also known as Ibrahim Abdul Rahman)

I was born around 1762 in Futa Jallon in what is today Guinea, West Africa. I was the son of Al-mami Ibrahim Sori, the religious and political leader of the Futa Jallon from 1751-1784. I was well-educated in the Islamic sciences, having studied in the great Islamic education center of Timbuktu, Mali, and I spoke three languages, including Arabic. I joined my father’s military. I was enslaved during a battle and sent to Natchez, Mississippi, in 1788. I was 26 years old at that time. I worked on the cotton plantation of Thomas Foster. I met my wife, Isabella, on the plantation. We had nine children together, all of whom were enslaved. Because I was educated and had military training, I had more power than other enslaved people who did not have the education I had. I was the foreman on the plantation, which had its privileges but always at the expense of other less powerful enslaved women and men. My wife and I were freed in 1828 after 40 years. For ten months, we toured the northern United States, telling our story to abolitionists to raise money to buy the freedom of our adult children. We moved to Liberia with the assistance of the American Colonization Society, an organization that was dedicated to both the end of slavery and the removal of Black people from the United States. I died in Liberia at the age of 67. There is a book and a film about me called *Prince Among Slaves*.

Nicholas Said

Nik-o-las Sa-eed

(also known as Muhammad Ali ben Said and Muhammad ibn Said)

I was born in Kouka in the kingdom of Borno (what is today Chad and Nigeria) in West Africa around 1833. I was the 13th of my mother's 19 children. My father was in the Borno army. He and three of my brothers were killed by an invading army from Bagirmey. I went to live with a man named Malam Katory who taught me to write and speak Arabic. Around 1846, I was enslaved by raiders and transported by horseback across the Sahara Desert. I was shipped to Istanbul in the Ottoman Empire and purchased by a Russian. I was renamed Nicholas Said after being baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church. Despite being enslaved for much of my life, I traveled to five continents and learned to speak seven languages. By 1863, I was a schoolteacher in Detroit — I came to the U.S. as a free man — and fought in the 55th Regiment of Massachusetts Colored Volunteers in the Union Army during the U.S. Civil War. I later settled in St. Stephens, Alabama, and wrote my *Autobiography* in 1873. At 224 pages, my *Autobiography* is the longest surviving narrative by an enslaved African Muslim. I died in Brownsville, Tennessee, in 1882.

Margaret Bilali

Marg-ret Bill-al-ee

I did not leave any written records about myself, but after I died, my granddaughter, Katie Brown, was interviewed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression. They wanted to interview her because her ancestors were enslaved and the WPA wanted to collect some of those stories. Katie told them about me:

My grandmother, Margaret, was one of seven daughters of Bilali or Bilali Mahomet (which is a different spelling of Muhammad). Her father was probably born around 1770 in what is today Guinea in West Africa. He was enslaved on Thomas Spalding's plantation on Sapelo Island, located off the coast of Georgia. Margaret used to watch her father and his wife, Phoebe, pray on the bead. They were very particular about the timing of their prayers. When the sun rose, when it was overhead, and when it set, those were times to pray. They did some bowing and prostrating on a little mat. They had long strings of beads they used to pray and ended with, "Ameen, Ameen," which is the Arabic pronunciation of Amen. Margaret covered her hair. She had some suspicions that her father had more than one wife. Historians don't know much about women like my grandmother, Margaret. There are very few written records of early Black Muslim women in the United States. Some enslaved Black Muslim men came with education they received in West African Muslim communities, but those opportunities were less available to girls and women.

Noble Drew Ali

No-bul Drew A-lee

I was born on January 8, 1886, in North Carolina to a Cherokee mother and Moroccan Muslim father. At age 16, I joined the Merchant Marine, traveled to Egypt, and met a priest of an “ancient cult of high magic” who took me to the Great Pyramid of Giza and left me there blindfolded. This was an important spiritual event in my life. When I returned to the United States, I established the Canaanite Temple in Newark, New Jersey in 1913. I organized the Moorish Science Temple of America in Chicago in 1925. In 1927, I published the Circle Seven Koran. Even though it is called the Koran, it does not include the Arabic text known as the Quran that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime (570-632CE). I linked the liberation of Blacks to both national and moral renewal. I rejected the racist social order by arguing that Black Americans were really descendants of Moors. Moor was a term used to identify a Muslim from the Middle East or North Africa. I believed that Islam was the common religion of “Asiatics” (a word we use to refer to the people of Asia) and that it was a religion of liberation. I was a prophet who brought the dead (black) back to life (Moor). Our message was meaningful to many people and the community expanded in the 1920s, a time known for “race riots.” For example, there were over 30 white-led attacks on Black communities across the United States in the summer of 1919, known as Red Summer. This was also the beginning of the Great Migration (1916-1970), when over six million Black Americans moved out of the South searching for both physical and spiritual safety.

Clara Muhammad

Klara Mu-ham-med

I was born Clara Evans on November 2, 1899, in Macon, Georgia. In 1917, I married Elijah Poole. Like millions of African Americans at the time, we fled the Jim Crow South in 1923 and landed in Detroit, where I met Wallace Fard Muhammad, a man that changed my life. We believed that Fard was God living on Earth and the founder of the Nation of Islam (NOI), a sect born in the Black American community. Fard was a door-to-door salesman who encouraged us to stop polluting our bodies with unhealthy foods and our minds with unhealthy beliefs like white supremacy. I introduced my husband, Elijah, to Fard. Elijah became Fard’s messenger and helped establish and grow the Nation of Islam. From 1935-1946, I was responsible for keeping the movement alive while my husband was opening temples in other cities. Elijah was thrown in jail from 1942-1946 for refusing to register for the draft and for instructing his followers not to register (legally known as sedition). I pioneered the NOI’s independent primary and secondary schools known as the University of Islam. The first classes met in my home and I was the teacher. It was illegal at this time to homeschool children and I had to deal with harassment from the police, but I stood my ground. When my son, Warith Deen Muhammad, took over the NOI after his father’s death, he changed the name of the University of Islam schools to Sister Clara Muhammad Schools in my honor. There are approximately 75 of them in the United States today. I died on August 12, 1972, from stomach cancer.

Betty Shabazz

Bet-ty Sha-bazz

I was born Betty Dean Sanders on May 28, 1934, in Detroit. I attended Tuskegee University in Alabama. The racism there was unbearable and I moved to New York City to finish my education as a nurse. I joined the Nation of Islam in 1956 when I met Malcolm X, who I married in 1958. I changed my name to Betty X. We used an X at the end of our names to eliminate the names that white slave owners gave our ancestors. My husband was responsible for the growth of the Nation of Islam (NOI) and brought countless other Americans — Black, Brown, and white — to Islam. We had to leave the Nation in 1964 because of internal disagreements over power and morals. My husband was assassinated on February 21, 1965, in Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom. Three male members of the NOI were imprisoned for his murder. I was there and saw the whole thing. I went on to earn a doctorate in higher education and curriculum development from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1975. I worked at the Medgar Evers College in New York, a majority Black working-class school. My daughter, Qubilah, was arrested for allegedly conspiring to kill Louis Farrakhan, the current leader of the Nation, because she believed he was involved in the murder of her father. My grandson, also named Malcolm, came to live with me during this difficult time. He set fire to my apartment on June 1, 1997. I was burned badly and died on June 23, 1997.

Warith Deen Mohammed

War-rith Deen Mu-ham-med

I was born Wallace Delaney Muhammad on October 30, 1933, in Hamtramck, Michigan, near Detroit. I was one of eight children of Clara and Elijah Muhammad. My father led the Nation of Islam from 1934 until his death in 1975. Arabic language, Islamic studies, and Black studies were part of my education. In 1961, I refused the military draft to fight in Vietnam and was sentenced to three years in prison, just like my father Elijah who was imprisoned for refusing the draft during World War II. After my father's death, I became the next leader of the Nation of Islam. I implemented a number of changes in beliefs and practices and moved the community to Sunni Islam. The majority of Muslims in the world identify as Sunni. I changed my name to Warith, one of the 99 names of God, meaning Inheritor. The majority of the Nation of Islam joined the W.D. Mohammed community. In 1992, I became the first Muslim to deliver the invocation for the United States Senate. I led prayers at both of President Bill Clinton's inaugurations. I participated in countless interfaith events and met with Pope John Paul II in 1996 and 1999. I died at home in Chicago on September 9, 2008, after a heart attack.

Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin

Ja-meel Ab-dool Al-A-meen

I was born Hubert Gerold Brown on October 4, 1943, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I became the fifth chairman of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee) in 1967, which is when I became known as H. Rap Brown. The SNCC was an important resistance organization of the 1960s. Despite the name, I questioned nonviolence. White people have been very violent towards Black people for the last 400 years. I believed this was an issue of self-defense. After giving a speech in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I was arrested for inciting a riot after I got shot by a cop. The trial for my arrest was moved to Bel Air, Maryland. On route to the court, two SNCC colleagues, Ralph Featherstone and William “Che” Payne, died when a bomb went off in their car. Of course, the police said we planted the bomb but it is important to remember that throughout U.S. history, the police and FBI have killed Black people with impunity (without being punished). I went on the run but was later caught and sent to prison from 1971-1976. In prison, I converted to Islam and changed my name. After being released from prison, I opened a grocery store in Atlanta’s West End and became an imam (religious leader) and community organizer. The police and FBI threatened and harassed me constantly, despite the fact that I preached self-discipline, faith, and spiritual development as a roadmap to liberation. There is nothing more threatening to the U.S. government than a Black man who believes it is a moral duty to fight oppression. In 2000, I began serving a life sentence at the U.S. Penitentiary, Tucson, after being convicted for the shooting of two Fulton County, Georgia, Sheriff’s deputies, one of whom, Ricky Kinchen, died.

Yusuf Lateef

You-sif La-teef

I was born William Emanuel Huddleston on October 9, 1920, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. My family moved to Detroit in 1925 as part of the Great Migration. Detroit was a vibrant Black city where all of the jazz greats played at one time or another. I was already a skilled saxophonist by the time I graduated high school. In 1949, I toured with Dizzy Gillespie, a jazz legend. In 1950, I converted to Islam as a member of the Ahmadiyya community, which was founded in India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) who claimed to be a divinely appointed revivalist of Islam. Some Muslims don’t like the Ahmadiyya because they do not agree with Ahmed’s religious beliefs. Muslims are not all one people, nor have we ever been. The Ahmadiyya helped spread Islam in the United States during the early half of the 20th century. They were known for speaking out against racism, which was attractive to a Black man like myself who was raised during Jim Crow. In addition to being a musician, I was also an educator. I earned a bachelor’s and master’s in music and music education from the Manhattan School of Music and taught at the Borough of Manhattan Community College. I later earned a doctorate in education from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. From 1981-85 I lived and worked in Nigeria. I produced many albums. Notably, in 1987, my album *Yusef Lateef’s Little Symphony* won a Grammy Award for Best New Age Album. I also composed *The African American Epic Suite* based on themes of slavery and anti-Black racism. In 1982, I received the highest award for a jazz musician, the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters award. I died on December 23, 2013 at the age of 93.

Kenneth Gamble

Ken-neth Gam-bull

I was born in Philadelphia on August 11, 1943. I started my music career in the 1960s with a band called the Romeos. Along with my songwriting and producing friend, Leon Huff, I created a unique musical style called the “Philly Sound,” a mix of soul ballads and funky dance tracks. We were one of the hottest R&B producing teams of the 1960s. We worked with Aretha Franklin, Dee Dee Warwick, The Supremes and The Temptations, Archie Bell & the Drells, and the Jackson Five. We wrote the theme music for the long-running TV dance show, Soul Train. In 1971, we opened Philadelphia International Records, which was the second largest Black-owned music company in the United States after Motown. I was a song writer and producer for nearly 30 years. Social justice and the empowerment of the Black community were central themes in my work. In the 1970s, I started buying run-down houses in order to rebuild the South Philly community, one house at a time. I founded a nonprofit organization called Universal Companies. We offer many different kinds of community empowerment such as workforce development, adult education, and job training courses. I also run a community development corporation that provides low- and moderate-income families with recently refurbished homes at affordable prices. My team and I have refurbished and populated hundreds of homes and created hundreds of jobs.

Louis Farrakhan Sr.

Lewis Far-ra-kan Senior

I am the current leader of the Nation of Islam. I was born Louis Eugene Wolcott in 1933 in the Bronx, New York. My mother, Sarah May Manning, was born in Saint Kitts and Nevis. My father, Percival Clark, was Jamaican. I never knew my biological father, but I did have a stepfather, Louis Wolcott. We then moved to Roxbury in Boston where there was a large Caribbean community. I was raised Episcopalian and church life was part of our routine. I married Betsy Ross (who later changed her name to Khadijah Farrakhan). I went to college and started my professional music career. Another musician introduced me to the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and I was transformed. I officially converted in 1955 and changed my name to Louis X. Later, Elijah Muhammad gave me the last name of “Farrakhan,” which means “The Criterion.” I rose through the ranks quickly and became the assistant to Minister Malcolm X. I took over the Boston temple when Malcolm was reassigned to Harlem, New York. After Elijah Muhammad’s death in 1975, I followed the leadership of Imam Warith Deen Mohammad until 1979, at which time I reestablished control of the Nation of Islam. In October 1995, I helped organize the Million Man March in Washington, D.C., calling on Black men to recommit to their families and communities. I have made anti-Jewish statements, for which I’ve faced a lot of criticism, and the SPLC (Southern Poverty Law Center) describes my beliefs as anti-white. I live in Chicago.

Keith Ellison

Keeth El-lis-son

I was born on August 4, 1963, in Detroit. I was raised Roman Catholic. I converted to Islam at the age of 19 because I felt a strong connection between the teachings of Islam and my desire to work for social justice. I am part of an interreligious family. For example, one of my brothers became the pastor of a Baptist congregation. In 2007, I became the first Muslim to be elected to the U.S. Congress, winning the U.S. Representative seat for Minnesota's 5th congressional district (which includes Minneapolis). I am also the first African American elected to the U.S. House from Minnesota. I have a number of important accomplishments under my belt. I helped organize protests against some high-profile police brutality cases in Minneapolis in 1989, forcing the attorney general to open an investigation and leading to the creation of the Coalition for Police Accountability, which organized community meetings and published a newsletter called *Cop Watch*. In the 2015 Democratic primary, I supported Bernie Sanders. In 2017, I lost the race for chair of the DNC (Democratic National Committee), the national organization representing the Democratic Party, after a number of Islamophobic smear campaigns in the media.

Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf

Mah-mood Ab-dool Ra-oof

I was born Chris Jackson on March 9, 1969. I played basketball for Gulfport High School and Louisiana State University. I grew up in poverty created by systemic racism and wealth inequality. I was placed in special education classes despite the fact that I had a serious health condition called Tourette Syndrome, which reduces my ability to control my muscles. I was embarrassed by this condition because I didn't know what it was. I wasn't diagnosed until I was 17 years old because I did not have the privilege of good healthcare. I was a highly talented basketball player thanks to relentless practice. I was drafted to the NBA and played for nine years. I was considered one of the best free throwers ever. In 1991, I converted to Islam. In March 1996, I refused to stand during the Star-Spangled Banner because I believed that as a Muslim, I should only submit to God. I also believed that the flag is a symbol of oppression and tyranny. I received death threats, I was suspended, and four white men from radio station Denver KBPI broke into my mosque while we were praying and played the Star-Spangled Banner on a trumpet and bugle. My house was later burned to the ground. My life story is told in the documentary film, *By the Dawn's Early Light: Chris Jackson's Journey to Islam*. My life parallels Muhammad Ali's (1942-2016), the boxer who refused the Vietnam War draft, and also Colin Kaepernick's (1987-present), a professional football quarterback who made headlines in 2016 for refusing to stand for the national anthem.

Aminah McCloud

A-mee-na Mc-cloud

I was born on December 1, 1948. I am one of the leading scholars on Islam in the United States, and the founder and chair of the Islamic World Studies Program at DePaul University in Chicago. My research, writing, and teaching focus on global Muslim cultures, Islam in the United States, Islamic law, African American Islam, and Muslim women in the United States. I have published many books and articles, including *African American Islam* and *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century*. I founded the *Journal on Islamic Law and Culture* in 1995, and I am still its editor-in-chief. I am a board member of the Feminist Sexual Ethics Project at Brandeis University, a member of the Board of Trustees for the American Islamic College, and a board member at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), among others. I founded and convened the Conference on Islam in America in 2011, a gathering that brought together American Muslims from various national and professional backgrounds for discussion on the state of Islam in America. I regularly advise non-profit organizations and government agencies on the realities of Muslims in the United States, and I appear in court as an expert witness on Islamic law.

Amina Wadud

A-mee-na Wa-dood

I was born Mary Teasley on September 25, 1952, in Bethesda, Maryland. My father was a Methodist minister. Growing up Black in the Jim Crow United States, my consciousness was raised to the intersections of religion and justice. I converted to Islam in 1972 and changed my name in 1974. I earned a PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Michigan, including studies at American University in Cairo, Cairo University, and Al-Azhar University, which is one of the oldest Islamic schools in the world. I am the author of several books, including *Inside the Gender Jihad* and *Qur'an and Woman*, which is available in seven translations. Some non-Muslims get really upset when they hear the word jihad because they think it only means "war." Jihad means "struggle" and I use it to symbolize our fight to abolish patriarchy (when men have power and won't share it with women). I was a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, from 1992-2008. In 2005, I led a mixed-gender prayer at the Episcopal Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City. This was controversial because most Muslims believe that only men should lead mixed-gender prayers. I continue to provide expertise on Islamic theology, pluralism, and gender equality.

Aisha Al-Adawiya

A-ee-sh-a Al-ad-a-wee-ya

I was born in 1944 in Alabama and grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of many Black churches established because of racism in white churches. Nevertheless, I felt spiritually unfulfilled. I was attracted to Catholicism but, as a Black woman, I did not feel welcome in their houses of worship. I moved to New York City in the early 1960s. Ironically, I was in a cult bookstore and found a copy of the Quran. I read it and knew this was the message for me. I became a Muslim. I am the founder and president of Women in Islam Inc., an organization of Muslim women which focuses on human rights and social justice. I represent Muslim women in United Nations forums. I make sure the stories of Muslims are included in Black history through my work at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library. I serve on numerous boards related to the interests of the global Muslim community, including the Interfaith Center of New York, KARMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, New York Jobs with Justice, The Malcolm X & Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, New York (CAIR-NY).

Yasiin Bey

Ya-seen Bay

I was born Dante Terrell Smith on December 11, 1973, in Brooklyn, New York. My father was a member of the Nation of Islam and later followed Warith Deen Mohammad, the son of Elijah Muhammad, who moved most of the community towards Sunnism in the late 1970s. I did not take my shahada, or testament of faith, until I was 19 years old. The shahada says, “There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” If you say this and mean it, you become Muslim. Growing up in New York during the crack epidemic, I witnessed a lot of pain and suffering that was a consequence of 400 years of systemic racism. These experiences influenced my work and commitment to Islam. Formerly known as Mos Def, I had a significant impact on the development of hip hop. There are a lot of similarities between the founding principles of hip hop and the spiritual principles of Islam, such as being committed to the lives and interests of the poor and suffering. I began my rap music career in 1994 with my brother and sister; we formed the group UTD (Urban Thermo Dynamics). I released a solo single called “Universal Magnetic,” which was a big hit and made people take notice of my talent. I later signed with Rawkus Records and formed the group Black Star, a reference to Marcus Garvey, one of the great Black nationalists from the early 20th century. I am also an actor and have made appearances in over 35 films and TV shows. In 2004, I returned to the recording studio and released four albums in five years, which resulted in a Grammy-nominated single and Grammy-nominated best rap album. I completed my final U.S. appearances in 2016 in order to focus on my arts collective, A Country Called Earth.

Ibtihaj Muhammad Ib-tee-haj Mu-ham-med

I was born December 4, 1985, in Maplewood, New Jersey. I loved sports but as a practicing Muslim girl, I didn't want to expose my body in order to play. On the suggestion of my mother, I started fencing at the age of 13. Fencers are fully covered. And it turns out I am really good at it. I championed two high school teams before attending Duke University, where I became a three-time NCAA All-American (an award for the best amateur or non-professional athlete) while double majoring in International Relations and African American Studies with a minor in Arabic. In the summer of 2006, I attended the School for International Training in Rabat, Morocco, where I completed courses in Moroccan culture and Arabic. After college, I won the gold medal at the 2009 USA Fencing National Championships. I was included in *TIME* magazine's 2016 edition of the 100 most influential people. In 2014, I launched a clothing company called Louella to make modest clothing more accessible in the U.S. market. I am a sports ambassador for the U.S. Department of State's Empowering Women and Girls Through Sports Initiative. I am the first Muslim American woman to wear hijab (Muslim headscarf) while competing in the Olympics. At the 2016 summer games in Rio, I made it clear that I do not feel safe as a Muslim woman living in the United States in the age of Trump.

Carolyn Walker-Diallo Kare-o-lin Wal-ker Dee-al-low

I was born in 1975 and raised in New York City. I received a Juris Doctor from New York Law School, a master's in business administration from the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College, and a bachelor's degree, cum laude (with distinction), in business administration and political science from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. I started my legal career as a litigation associate representing Fortune 500 companies and international banks in contract disputes, arbitration, and government investigations. In 2009, I continued a tradition passed on in my family of "being the change we want to see in the world" by taking control of a small non-profit named after my father, the George Walker Jr. Community Coalition Inc., which provides youth development and community services in East New York and Cypress Hills. In 2015, I became a civil court judge of the 7th Municipal District at the Brooklyn Borough Hall in New York. I used the Quran during my swearing-in ceremony. Some Americans found this threatening and sent me hate mail. I am a proud member of Gamma Gamma Chi Sorority Inc., the first sorority for Muslim women, and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., the oldest Greek-lettered organization established by African American college-educated women. I live in Brooklyn, New York, with my husband, Thierno Malal Diallo, a teacher, and our daughter, Mariama Diallo.

Bilqis Abdul-Qadir
Bil-qees Ab-dool Qa-dr

I was born on November 11, 1990, in Springfield, Massachusetts. I attended the New Leadership Charter School where I began playing varsity basketball in the 8th grade. In high school, I became the third freshman in Massachusetts history to score over 1,000 points. I scored 3,070 points when I was a senior, passing the previous record of 2,740 points. In 2009, I was named the Gatorade Player of the Year. I was accepted at the University of Memphis. My freshman season marked the first time in NCAA history that a player played in hijab (Muslim headscarf). For that, I got to go to the White House and meet President Obama, who encouraged me to be proud of my faith. I also worked with Michelle Obama on her “Let’s Move” campaign. I graduated magna cum laude (with great distinction) with a bachelor’s degree in health and human performance/exercise science from the University of Memphis. I wanted to play professionally in Europe but the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) prohibited head gear larger than five inches. It is such a silly rule that has nothing to do with my ability to play. In response, I started an online campaign called “Muslim Girls Hoop Too” to fight back against the stereotypes. Thanks to activists like me, FIBA lifted the ban in May 2017.

Meet-and-Greet Worksheet

1. Find one person who was enslaved. Where were they from? Where did they end up? How did they resist?
2. Find one person who experienced discrimination based on their race or religion. Describe their experience.
3. Find two women. Describe some of their achievements.
4. Find two people who worked for justice. Explain how they do/did that.
5. Find at least one person who has been active during your lifetime. Describe some of their experiences.

Reflection & Discussion

Silent Reflection

Spend 2-3 minutes quietly answering the following: What did you learn in this activity?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Discussion Questions

In groups of 3-4, spend 10-15 minutes discussing the following:

Provide a few examples of the first Muslims to come to the United States. What were their names? When did they arrive in the United States? How did they get here?

In past experiences learning about slavery, did you hear the stories of enslaved Muslims? Is it important to hear these stories when we talk about slavery? Why or why not?

What are the different types of roles Muslims have played in U.S. history?

How have Muslims fought injustice?

Who would you want to meet or research more? Why?