

Meet & Greet: Muslims in the United States

This extension to Alison Kysia's lesson plan serves to highlight additional notable Muslims in today's social and cultural landscape. Today, Muslims in America come from diverse backgrounds and take on a variety of roles in news, media, and activism.

Linda Sarsour

I was born in 1980 in Brooklyn, New York to Palestinian immigrants. I am the eldest of my seven siblings and I originally wanted to become an English teacher. After the September 11 attacks, however, I began to focus my work on advocating for the civil rights of American Muslims. I became the director of the Arab American Association of New York in 2005, and expanded the scope of the organization from an annual budget of \$50,000 to \$700,000. Thereafter my work included protesting police surveillance of American Muslims, as well as issues of immigration, mass incarceration, and the NYPD's stop-and-frisk discriminatory policies. I was honored to be recognized as a Champion of Change by President Barack Obama in 2012. During the 2016 Presidential Election, I became the "face of the resistance" and was recruited as a co-chair of the 2017 Women's March. I vehemently protested the Trump administration's "Muslim Ban" in *Sarsour v. Trump* 2017 class action lawsuit. Ever since I have been in the spotlight, there have been false reports about my beliefs and connections, even calling me "anti-Semitic" for my support of Palestinians. In 2017, however, I was named one of *Time* magazine's "100 Most Influential People." Today, I continue my work with the Women's March as well as supporting the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Hasan Minhaj

I was born on September 23, 1985 to Indian Muslim parents who immigrated to Davis, California where I was born and raised. I attended the University of California at Davis and majored in political science. In 2009, I moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career as a comedian. I was a finalist on NBC's *Stand-up for Diversity* and then began performing on a variety of shows. In 2014, I was hired for my biggest role to date, as a correspondent on *The Daily Show*. Thereafter, I was chosen as the featured speaker at the 2017 White House Correspondents' Dinner where I criticized President Donald Trump and reminded the press to do their jobs. In May 2017, my first stand-up special, *Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King*, premiered on Netflix and won a television Peabody Award. And in October 2018, my new show, *Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj*, premiered on Netflix and explores the modern cultural and political landscape in America.

Lupe Fiasco

I was born on February 16, 1982 in the West Side of Chicago, Illinois. My name is Wasalu Muhammad Jaco, but most people know me as Lupe Fiasco. Growing up in a tough neighborhood, my parents, Shirley and Gregory (a member of the Black Panther Party), exposed me to a variety of subjects and literature. Thus, I began writing poetry at an early age, which I used as the foundation for my rap when I began creating music. I was inspired by Nas, and Ice Cube, and Jay Z who later helped me get a record deal at Atlantic Records. I use my music as an opportunity to highlight issues that are important to me like civil rights, immigration, religion, and war. I've won multiple awards for my music, including a 2008 Grammy. My album *Lasers* was nominated for Best Rap Album. I am best known for my songs "Superstar" and "The Show Goes On." Islam plays an important role in my life, but I don't want people to look at me as the poster child for Islam because I'm not. I've been involved in a number of controversies regarding my lyrics, but I will continue to talk about the issues that I see in our world today.

Ilhan Omar

I was born on October 4, 1981 in Mogadishu, Somalia. When the Somali Civil War began in 1991, my family and I had to flee the country, and we spent four years in a refugee camp in Kenya. In 1995, we moved to Minneapolis, where I learned English but also was bullied for wearing a *hijab* by my classmates. I became a citizen when I was 17 years old and started my career in politics. In 2018, I became the first naturalized citizen from Africa and first Somali-American elected to the United States Congress. Along with Rashida Tlaib, I was one of the first two Muslim women elected to Congress and the first woman of color to serve as a U.S. representative from Minnesota. I was sworn in on my grandfather's copy of the Qur'an, and I co-authored the proposal to repeal the ban on head coverings in the U.S. House. Since then, I have shown my support for Medicare for All, immigration, and LGBTQ rights.

Khadijah Rivera

I was born in 1950 and converted to Islam from Roman Catholicism. My husband was Egyptian-Muslim and we were heavily involved in our community and a variety of social causes. I encouraged community members to become active at their local mosques. I, myself, taught at a local Tampa Bay school while coordinating Project Downtown Tampa to help the homeless and needy. In 1988, I founded the first organization for Latina Muslims called PIEDAD, in New York. Our organization helps encourage participation in local mosques to collaborate and better local communities and now consists of people from all backgrounds.

Blair Imani

I was born on October 31, 1993, and I graduated from Louisiana State University in 2015. After the police-involved shooting of Alton Sterling, I took part in a peaceful protest where I was arrested and threatened by Baton Rouge SWAT officers. Since then, I have spoken about the intersection of Black and Muslim identities and since coming out in 2017, I have advocated for safe spaces on college campuses for Muslims, LGBT people, and other minorities. Currently, I am the Press Officer for Planned Parenthood, and the founder and executive director of Equality for Her, a nonprofit organization that's dedicated to raising awareness about issues that affect the global femme community.

Halima Aden

I was born on September 19, 1997 in a refugee camp in Kenya. I moved to the United States when I was six years old. In 2016, I became the first contestant in the Miss Minnesota USA pageant to compete in a burkini and *hijab*. I received national media attention for this, after which I signed a contract with IMG Models and debuted at New York Fashion Week for Yeezy Season 5. Since then, I have become the first hijab-wearing model to be signed to a major agency and the first to be featured on the cover of major publications like Vogue Arabia, Allure, and British Vogue. I hope that I can be a role model for American Muslim youth while pushing for more diversity in the modeling industry.

Noor Tagouri

I was born on November 27, 1993 to Libyan parents and was raised in southern Maryland. Growing up, I was obsessed with storytelling and dreamed of one day being like Oprah and Barbara Walters. I graduated with a degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Maryland. I was told throughout my career that I would not be able to make it as a news anchor if I continued to wear the *hijab*, but that changed when I got an internship with CBS Radio in 2012. Since then, I have continued my passion for telling the stories that cause me pain, but often overlooked by the mainstream media. I produced a short documentary called *The Trouble They've Seen: The Forest Haven Story*, about the mistreatment of people with mental disabilities. Afterwards, I began my work on an investigative documentary about the U.S. sex trade, called *Sold in America*.

Kumail Najiani

I was born on February 21, 1978 in Karachi, Pakistan. I moved to the United States when I was 19 and graduated from Grinnell College in 2001 with a degree in computer science and philosophy. I began my film and television career by guest starring on shows such as *Portlandia*, *Veep*, and *Silicon Valley*. In 2017, my film, *The Big Sick* premiered and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. The film was inspired by my relationship with my wife. In 2018, I was named one of the one-hundred most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine. I have spoken extensively about the representation of Muslims in Hollywood and recognize the need for diverse roles for Muslim characters.

Reza Aslan

I was born on May 3, 1972, in Iran, but grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area after fleeing the Iranian Revolution with my family in 1979. I was born into a Shia Muslim family and converted to evangelical Christianity when I was 15 years old. I converted back to Islam and Sufism is the Islamic tradition to which I most closely adhere. I believe that all religions are just languages to express faith, and none is more right than the other. I have degrees in Theological Studies, Fine Arts, and Sociology. I use this academic background to write about Islam, fundamentalism, and various religions. I have a deep respect for other religions and in 2017, my documentary series *Believer* premiered, where I immerse myself in religious traditions from all over the world.
