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**A PROFILE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
MASJIDS: A REPORT FROM THE  
NATIONAL MASJID STUDY 2000**

**Introduction**

The presence of Islam in America is now a well-recognized reality, especially since the September 11 terrorists attack. The presence of Islam in the African-American community has long been a recognized reality. African Americans knew of Islam from the Nation of Islam and its ubiquitous paper salesmen in the 1970s, the Black hero Malcolm X, the number of Black celebrities who converted to Islam, and the fact that most African Americans know a family member, friend, or neighbor who had converted. Nevertheless, understanding the phenomena of Islam among African Americans and the general society is just beginning. In particular, the masjid,<sup>1</sup> which is the center of the Muslim's collective existence, is little understood.

This article seeks to present a basic statistical profile of African-American masjids that can be used as a benchmark and a springboard for further study. The data come from the first comprehensive study of masjids, which was undertaken in conjunction with a study directed by Hartford Seminary where religious congregations in America were surveyed in 2000. A common questionnaire was developed by the participating

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<sup>1</sup>Masjid means a place of prostration and is, therefore, the place of prayer for Muslims. The word "masjid" is the proper word and not the more commonly used word "mosque." For this study, a masjid is defined as a place where Jum'ah (Friday) Prayer, the weekly congregational prayer, is held with other Islamic activities.

religious groups, and then each group conducted its own study. The common questionnaire makes possible comparisons between masjids and other religious congregations, especially Black churches.

The masjid study involved a phone interview of 416 masjid leaders in the year 2000. Minister Farrakhan's Nation of Islam and other groups outside the mainstream of Islam were not included. Preliminarily, research was conducted to verify the total number of masjids, using seven existing masjid lists and following up with mailings and phone calls. The result was a list of 1209 masjids. From that list, 631 masjids were randomly sampled and 416 interviews were completed with a resulting margin of error of  $\pm 5$  percent. The masjid study was published as *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait*.<sup>2</sup>

### **The African-American Masjid**

The main features of the African-American masjid that emerges from this study are:

- African-American masjids are experiencing steady and significant but not spectacular growth in the number of masjids and participants.
- African-American masjids are active in the local community especially in social advocacy programs such as prison program and anti-crime programs. Confronting issues of justice is an important priority in the African-American masjid.
- The infrastructure and financial foundation of the African-

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<sup>2</sup>See Ihsan Bagby, Paul Perl, and Bryan Froehle, *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait* (Washington, DC: Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2001.)

American masjid remain weak. Few Imams (religious leaders) are paid or full-time; few masjids have paid staff; masjid revenue is modest, and few masjid buildings have been built from the ground up.

- Also, few Imams have formal Islamic education.
- African-American masjids feel good about themselves: They have high levels of vitality, and they are excited about the future.

Two important issues are apparent throughout much of this study. The writer notes these, but a full examination lies in the future. The first is the relationship of African-American masjids to normative and traditional Islam—the Islam of the holy texts, Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet, and the Islam practiced in the Muslim world. African-American Muslims come to Islam carrying African-American and American cultural experiences (foremost the Black Church and the street), and the question arises: How much of that unique African-American culture is to be left behind? How are African-American Muslims to interpret and implement the basic texts of Islam? To what extent should African-American Muslims follow the traditional practices of the Muslim world, which is the culture that immigrant Muslims bear? This theme emerges most decisively in the issue of women and their involvement in the masjid. The second is the relationship of African-American masjids to the American society. Most African-American Muslims, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, came to Islam rejecting or at least highly dissatisfied with American culture and politics. How should African-American Muslims now view and interact with other religious groups, American institutions, and mainstream politics?

### Basic Characteristics of African-America Masjids

Masjids of America are highly diverse, but the vast majority are attended primarily by one ethnic group. African-American Muslims are regular participants in 90 percent of all masjids. The number of masjids predominately African American is 332, which constitutes 27 percent of the 1,209 total masjids in America.<sup>3</sup>

#### Number of Immigrant/ African-American Masjids

|                  | <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Total Number of Masjids</u> |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| African-American | 27%               | 332                            |
| Immigrant        | 73%               | 876*                           |

\* One masjid in the survey was predominantly white American and is not included in all calculations.

In a similar, albeit less comprehensive masjid study in 1994, African-American masjids constituted 29 percent of a total of 962 masjids in America.<sup>4</sup> There were, therefore, approximately 279 African-American masjids in 1994. The increase from 1994 to 2000 represents a 19 percent increase for African-American masjids and a 25 percent increase for all masjids.

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<sup>3</sup>Dominant groups are calculated by this standard: 35-39 percent of participants in one group and all other groups less than 20 percent; 40-49 percent of one group and all others less than 30 percent; 50-59 percent of one group and all others less than 40; any group over 55 percent.

<sup>4</sup>Bagby, *The Mosque in America*, 19.

### Change in Number of All Mosjids and African-American Mosjids

|                  | <u>2000</u> | <u>1995</u> | <u>Increase</u> |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| African American | 332         | 279         | 19%             |
| Total Mosjids    | 1209        | 962         | 25%             |

In the predominately African-American mosjids, an average 84 percent of participants are African American and 16 percent are non-African American, most of whom are Muslims who emigrated from the Muslim world. In a virtual mirror image, the immigrant-dominated masjid about 85 percent of its participants are immigrants; and 15 percent are non-immigrant, 9 percent being African American. The frame of analysis in this article is the predominately African-American masjid, but data from immigrant mosjids is included for comparison purposes.

### Mosjid Affiliation

The majority (56 percent) of African-American mosjids is affiliated with the Muslim American Society (MAS) under the leadership of Imam W. Deen Mohammed. The other 44 percent of African-American mosjids are a loose, unorganized group that the writer has called "historically sunni African-American mosjids." These are presently divided between mosjids affiliated with an assortment of Muslim organizations and those not associated with any national organization.

**Affiliation of African-American Masjids<sup>5</sup>**

|   | <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Estimated Total<br/>Number of Masjids</u> |
|---|-------------------|--|
| Muslim American<br>Society (MAS)                              | 56%               | 227  |
| Historically<br>Sunni African-<br>American Masjids<br>(HSAAM) | 44%               | 157  |

The Muslim American Society (MAS) is the successor to the original Nation of Islam (NOI), founded around 1930 as a syncretic mixture of Islam, Black Nationalism, masonry, and Christianity. The leader of the Muslim American Society is W. Deen Mohammed, who is the son of Elijah Muhammad, the founder of the Nation of Islam. Imam Mohammed succeeded his father upon his death in 1975 and immediately started the transition of the Nation of Islam into a mainstream Islamic group. Not only did W. Deen Mohammed jettison the un-Islamic theological tenets of the old Nation of Islam, but he also directed his organization away from the radicalism and harsh criticism of America. The American flag has been on their masthead of the organization's journal since the 1970s. W. Deen Mohammed is now the champion of interfaith dialogue and working within the American system. MAS has also resisted identifying itself with any particular trend within

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<sup>5</sup>The total number of MAS and HSAAM masjids is slightly higher than the number of African-American masjids, because there are nine predominately immigrant masjids that belong to MAS or another African-American organization. Also, eight masjids have indicated multiple affiliations with MAS and other organizations; these are placed under HSAAM.

the Muslim world. In fact, MAS members have toyed with the idea that the views of Imam Mohammed constitute a separate *mathhab* or legal school, different from the other traditional schools of thought.

Historically sunni African-American masjids (HSAAM) are a fractured group that has turned away from the syncretic manifestations of Islam and sought a more authentic, normative form. The phrase, "historically sunni," is used, following the Muslim leader K. Ahmad Tawfiq, who in the 1960s, began using "sunni Muslim" to distinguish between the Nation of Islam and the African-American Muslims. This group attempted to follow the *sunnah* (exemplary practice) of the Prophet Muhammad. Their roots are found in the 1930s; leaders such as Muhammad Ezaldeen and Dawud Ahmad Faisal who left the Moorish Science Temple, and Wali Akram who left the Ahmadiyyah movement in order to find "real" Islam. Attempts to unite this group have occurred many times since the 1940s, but each has ended in failure. As a footnote, another new effort to unite these Muslims has recently emerged in the form of the Muslim Alliance of North America, which was started at the time of the writing of this article.

Of the list of Muslims organizations with which this group of historically sunni African-American masjids are affiliated, the only ones that are predominately African-American are the National Community under the leadership of Imam Jamil Al-Amin (the former H. Rap Brown) and the Sabiqun (Vanguard) led by Imam Musa Abdul Alim.

Historically sunni African-American masjids, the most prominent being Imam Jamil Al-Amin, are much more critical of the American political system and a portion eschews interfaith dialogue. They also have been more intent on digesting normative Islamic practice. Although relatively small in

number, Imam Jamil's leadership and organization are recognized by other national Muslim organizations; evidenced by the fact that the Islamic Shura Council, a national unity council of major national organizations, includes Imam Jamil's group along with Imam Mohammed's MAS, Islamic Society of North America, and Islamic Circle of North America.

### **Affiliations of Historical Sunni African-American Masjids**

| <u>Organization</u>                | <u>Percentage Affiliated</u> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| National Community (Jamil Al-Amin) | 7.3%                         |
| Islamic Society of North America   | 7.0%                         |
| Islamic Circle of North America    | 4.4%                         |
| Tablighi Jamaat                    | 1.8%                         |
| Islamic Assembly of North America  | 1.8%                         |
| Sabiqun                            | 1.4%                         |

Ethnic diversity within these two groups differs significantly. The MAS masjids have fewer immigrant participants. On the average, 15 percent are non-African American. In the other historically sunni African-American masjids, the average number of non-African-American participants is 26 percent.

### **Age of Masjid Congregations**

African-American masjid congregations are relatively young—73 percent of their masjids were established since 1970. The vast majority of immigrant masjids are even younger: 88 percent were started since 1970. More African-American masjids existed in the early periods before 1970 than immigrant masjids. The youth of masjids can be seen in the fact that only 39 per-



cent of all religious congregations,<sup>6</sup> and 23 percent of Black churches were founded since 1966.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the founding dates of masjids, some tentative observations can be made. From the 1920s through the 1940s, the Nation of Islam and the historically sunni African-American masjids had about an equal number of masjids/temples. The success of the NOI in the 1950s is reflected in the fact that 20 percent of MAS masjids were established in that decade. The 1970s is a great decade of growth for all African-American masjids. However, in the 1980s and 1990s a greater percentage of historically sunni African American masjids were being established—63 percent of all HSAMMs were established since 1980.

### Decade in Which Present African-American Masjids Founded

| <u>Decade</u> | <u>All African-<br/>American Masjids</u> | <u>Muslim<br/>American Society</u> | <u>HSAAM</u>          |
|---------------|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|               | <u>Percent/Number</u>                    | <u>Percent/Number</u>              | <u>Percent/Number</u> |
| 1920-1940     | 4.4%/5                                   | 2.9%/2                             | 5.5%/3                |
| 1950          | 13.2%/15                                 | 20.3%/14                           | 1.9%/1                |
| 1960          | 9.6%/11                                  | 11.6%/8                            | 5.6%/3                |
| 1970          | 24.6%/28                                 | 30.4%/21                           | 24.1%/13              |
| 1980          | 22.8%/26                                 | 17.4%/12                           | 25.9%/14              |
| 1990          | 25.4%/29                                 | 17.4%/12                           | 37.0%/20              |

<sup>6</sup>See Carl S. Dudley and David Roozen, *Faith Communities Today: A Report on Religion in the United States Today* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary, 2001); also the Hartford Seminary web site [www.hartsem.edu](http://www.hartsem.edu).

<sup>7</sup>All statistics on the Black Church are from the Gallup Organization, ITC/Faith Factor Project 2000: Draft Research Report, July 2000 and a series of reports, *ITC/FaithFactor, Project 2000 Study of Black Churches*, 2001.

### Location of Masjids

Geographically, African-American masjids are evenly distributed over the various regions of America, except the West. The African-American groups show certain distinct patterns. The largest percentage of MAS masjids is found in the South—41 percent. Among historically sunni African-American masjids, the South only constitutes 20 percent. A greater percentage of HSAAMs is in the East (41 percent), their strongest region. The Midwest is about equal.

#### Regional Location of African-American Masjids

(Percentage of masjids located in the region)

| <u>Region</u> | <u>All African-<br/>American Masjids</u> | <u>Muslim<br/>American Society</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|---------------|--|------------------------------------|--------------|
| East          | 31.6%                                    | 21.7%                              | 40.7%        |
| South         | 30.7%                                    | 40.6%                              | 20.4%        |
| Midwest       | 31.6%                                    | 31.9%                              | 29.6%        |
| Mountain/West | 6.1%                                     | 5.8%                               | 9.3%         |

African-American masjids are an urban phenomena—88 percent are located in city neighborhoods or inner city/downtown neighborhoods. Only 5 percent are located in suburbs and 7 percent in towns and rural areas. In comparison, 23 percent of Black churches are situated in suburbs. Although masjids are located in urban areas, a large percentage of masjid participants are not. Approximately 43 percent travel more than fifteen minutes to the masjid. The well-known phenomena of parishioners commuting back to their old neighborhood church seems to be replicated among Muslims.

### Mosjid Location

(Percentage of mosjids located in the region)

| <u>Location</u>          | <u>All African-American Mosjids</u> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| City neighborhood        | 61.4%                               |
| City downtown/Inner city | 26.3%                               |
| Suburb                   | 5.3%                                |
| Town/Rural               | 7.0%                                |

### Basic Characteristics of Active Participants

Mosjid leaders were asked questions concerning active participants in their masjid. One finding is that a large percentage is relatively young. An estimated 45 percent of all participants are below the age of 35. Approximately 11 percent are over 60. Masjid congregations are relatively well educated—29 percent are college graduates. However, according to masjid leaders, 31 percent have incomes below \$20,000, which means that a large percentage are below the poverty line. Another conclusion is that masjid congregations are diverse in terms of education and income. African-American mosjids do not represent one particular socio-economic class. As already mentioned, a large percentage of participants do not live in the masjid's urban neighborhood. In almost all these categories the profile of participants in mosjids is similar to those in Black churches.

### Characteristics of Participants in African-American Mosjids and Churches

(Percentage in masjid/church)

| <u>Mosjids</u>              |     | <u>Black Churches</u>       |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|
| College graduates           | 29% | College graduates           | 30% |
| 35 years and younger        | 45% | Age 18-35                   | 33% |
| 60 years and older          | 11% | 60 years and older          | 25% |
| Travel more than 15 minutes | 43% | Travel more than 15 minutes | 40% |
| Income below \$20,000       | 31% | Income below \$20,000       | 30% |

### Muslim Women in the Masjid

Masjids are male-dominated institutions. In the Muslim world women virtually have no presence. If women do attend, they are placed in a separate room or behind a barrier. In all Muslim masjids, men and women pray separately, but placing a barrier between them is a choice. In the masjid of the Prophet Muhammad there was no barrier between men and women. At the weekly Jum'ah prayer in African-American masjids, 21 percent of the attendees are women. The number of women associated with the African-American masjid is approximately 32 percent of the total number of participants. In MAS masjids, women's participation is slightly higher: 24 percent of attendees at Jum'ah Prayer are women and 36 percent of total participants are women. Other historically sunni African-American masjids have less involvement of women: 17 percent of Jum'ah attendees are women, and 25 percent of the total regular participants are women.

#### Percentage of Participation of Women in Jum'ah Prayer and the Masjid

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Jum'ah Prayer                |     |
| All African-American Masjids | 21% |
| Immigrant                    | 13% |
| MAS                          | 24% |
| HSAAM                        | 17% |

#### Percentage of Women Associated with Masjid

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| All African-American Masjids | 32% |
| Immigrant                    | 23% |
| MAS                          | 36% |
| HSAAM                        | 25% |

In 30 percent of African-American mosjids women pray behind a curtain or in another room. This can be compared to 81 percent of all immigrant mosjids where the tradition of placing women behind a barrier is adhered. There is a sharp difference between African-American mosjids: In MAS mosjids only 16 percent have a curtain, while 45 percent of historically sunni African-American mosjids have women pray behind a curtain.

A controversial issue for some mosjids is whether Muslim women can serve on the governing board. In African-American mosjids, 77 percent of the mosjids allow women to serve on their governing bodies. In comparison, 64 percent of immigrant mosjids allow it. Again, there is a sharp distinction between MAS and historically sunni African-American mosjids. Among MAS mosjids, 92.5 percent of the mosjids allow women to serve. Among HSAAMs only 60 percent are allowed to serve. Clearly, a portion of historically sunni African-American mosjids is more conservative regarding the issue of women.

### **Are Women Allowed to Serve on Governing Board?**

(Percentage of Mosjids Consenting)

|                      |       |
|----------------------|-------|
| All African-American | 77%   |
| Immigrant            | 66%   |
| MAS                  | 92.5% |
| HSAAM                | 60%   |

### **Mosjid Size and Growth**

The average attendance at Jum'ah prayer in African-American mosjids is 114, as compared to 361 in immigrant mosjids. Historically sunni African-American mosjids have a higher Jum'ah attendance than MAS mosjids. Jum'ah attendance at

historically sunni African-American masjids is 131 and at MAS masjids attendance is 97.

### Participation Numbers in Masjid

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Average Jum'ah Prayer Attendance       |     |
| All African-American Masjids           | 114 |
| Immigrant                              | 361 |
| MAS                                    | 97  |
| HSAAM                                  | 131 |
| <br>                                   |     |
| Average Active Participants Per Masjid |     |
| All African-American Masjids           | 146 |
| Immigrant                              | 412 |
| MAS                                    | 127 |
| HSAAM                                  | 157 |

### Average Total Number Participants Associated with Masjid

|                              |       |
|------------------------------|-------|
| All African-American Masjids | 495   |
| Immigrant                    | 2,049 |
| MAS                          | 488   |
| HSAAM                        | 457   |

Active participants in African-American masjids average about 146 per masjid, and the total number of all Muslims associated with the masjid averages 495. An active participant is a Muslim who regularly attends Jum'ah and other masjid functions. The total number of participants includes those Muslims who at least come to the Eid prayers, which are the main holidays in the Muslim calendar. Immigrant masjids

have a much larger number of active participants and total participants. In comparison, Black churches average about 100 active members per church and 500 total members per church.

### Total Attendance at Jum'ah Prayer

|         | <u>All African</u> | <u>Immigrant</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|---------|--------------------|------------------|------------|--------------|
| 4-50    | 45%                | 20%              | 52%        | 31%          |
| 51-100  | 19%                | 16%              | 22%        | 24%          |
| 101-200 | 23%                | 16%              | 16%        | 28%          |
| 201-500 | 11%                | 32%              | 9%         | 15%          |
| 501 +   | 2%                 | 16%              | 1%         | 2%           |

### Conversions

Overall, an African-American masjid averages 18.7 converts per year. This compares to 14.5 converts for every immigrant masjid and a conversion rate of 16.3 for all masjids. It must be noted that these figures are for conversions inside the masjid and not those that occur outside the masjid; therefore, the conversion rate is undoubtedly higher. In African-American masjids virtually all converts are African-American—93 percent. In immigrant masjids, approximately 55 percent are African and 31 percent are white American. Based on these figures, approximately 13,000 African-American Muslims converted to Islam last year, but only about half of the conversions developed in African-American masjids.

Within the group of African-American masjids, historically sunni African-American masjids have a higher conversion rate than the MAS masjids: HSAAMs average 20.8 per year, and MAS masjids average 15.2.

### Converts Per Year

| <u>Number</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|---------------|------------|--------------|
| 0             | 7%         | 4%           |
| 1-5           | 49%        | 28%          |
| 6-10          | 15%        | 16%          |
| 11-49         | 19%        | 39%          |
| 50+           | 10%        | 14%          |

In African-American and immigrant masjids about 65 percent of the converts are male and 35 percent are female. The same breakdown holds true for MAS and HSAAM masjids. In all masjids, approximately 42 percent of converts, have continued to participate regularly. This points to an apparent problem of retention.

### Growth

Masjid leaders were asked if the number of participants in their masjid increased or decreased and the percentage of increase or decrease. Approximately 70 percent of all African-American masjids indicated an increase in numbers. Only 5 percent of African-American masjids are decreasing. Exactly 80 percent of immigrant masjids indicated an increase, which indicates faster growth than African-American masjids. In comparison, 51 percent of all religious congregations and 58 percent of Black churches indicate an increase in membership.

Almost half (49 percent) of all African-American masjids are growing by 10 percent or more. Within the group of African-American masjids, the historically sunni African-American masjids show the strongest growth—59 percent have increased more than 10 percent as opposed to MAS



mosques, which have increased 49 percent.

### Growth of Participants in Mosques

|                             | All African<br><u>American</u> | Immigrant<br><u>Mosques</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|--------------|
| 10% +                       | 49%                            | 66%                         | 42%        | 59%          |
| 1-9%                        | 21%                            | 14%                         | 21%        | 21%          |
| Stayed same<br>or decreased | 30%                            | 20%                         | 37%        | 21%          |

High growth rates are associated with four factors:

- High levels of religious and educational ventures, such as Islamic study classes and youth activities.
- High levels of outreach activities, such as visiting schools to present Islam.
- Paid Imam.
- Mosque size, although high rates are associated positively with all sizes of mosques except the smallest ones.

### Vitality

Approximately 80 percent of all African-American mosques indicated that being "vital and alive, with *Iman* (faith) and *Taqwa* (piety)" fits their mosque "very well" or "quite well." These figures compare well to the mainline churches (68 percent) as indicated in the *Faith Communities Today* report, but below the results for Black churches (89%).

The factors associated with high vitality are:

- Religious or educational activities

- Sense of brotherhood
- Sense of strictness
- Sense of activism in the social-justice arena
- Sense that the masjid is well organized
- Sense that the masjid welcomes change
- Ability to get volunteers

### Vitality and Index of Religious Activities

| <u>Vitality</u> | <u>High Activities</u> | <u>Moderate Activities</u> | <u>Low Activities</u> |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Very Well       | 51%                    | 38%                        | 29%                   |
| Quite Well      | 30%                    | 48%                        | 47%                   |
| Somewhat to     | 19%                    | 14%                        | 24%                   |
| Not at all      | 19%                    | 14%                        | 24%                   |

Programmatically, vitality is associated only with religious-educational activities and not other activities such as outreach, politics, or community involvement. This seems to indicate that leaders view the masjid through the lens of the traditional purpose, a place for spiritual and educational nutriment. Interestingly, vitality is not associated with masjid size, region, growth, income, paid Imam, Islamic approach, and the sense that the masjid has a strong ethnic heritage.

MAS and the historically sunni African-American masjids are virtually identical in all these measures, except one: vitality is not associated with a sense of strictness among MAS masjids. Obviously, many MAS masjids do not view strictness in a positive light.

### Ethnic Heritage

Masjid leaders were asked about the presence of a strong

ethnic or national heritage in the masjid. Approximately 38 percent of all African-American mosjids answered that the statement "our masjid has a strong ethnic heritage" fits their masjid "very well." In comparison, 14 percent of immigrant mosjids answered "very well." Masjid leaders were also asked how well does their masjid try to preserve their ethnic or national heritage. Approximately 20 percent of African-American mosjids responded that this statement fits their mosjids, "very well" as opposed to 9 percent of immigrant mosjids. Among Black churches there is also a greater emphasis on ethnic heritage: 56 percent of Black churches have a strong expression of ethnic heritage as opposed to 5 percent in all religious congregations.

The ideal in Islam is that the body of Muslims is one—no distinction except piety. One's Islamic identity is supposed to be primary, and one's ethnic heritage secondary. With the great ethnic diversity of the Muslim community in America, immigrant mosjids tend to stress this ideal, at least rhetorically, and minimize ethnic heritage. African-American mosjids feel more comfortable expressing connection to their ethnic identity.

On this issue, however, a marked difference exists between the Muslim American Society and historically sunni African-American mosjids. Over 44 percent of all MAS mosjids responded "very well" to the statement that their masjid has a strong ethnic heritage as opposed to 23 percent of historically sunni African-American mosjids. To the question of preserving ethnic heritage, 29 percent of MAS mosjids answered "very well" as opposed to 6 percent of HSAAMs.

### Strong Ethnic or National Heritage

|                                  | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| High Ethnic<br>Heritage          | 38%                             | 14%                          | 44%        | 23%          |
| High Preserve<br>Ethnic Heritage | 20%                             | 9%                           | 29%        | 6%           |

### Strictness and Islamic Approach

Almost half of African-American masjids say that they are strict in following the *sunnah* (normative example) of the Prophet. Over 41 percent indicate that they do "quite well" in being strict. The idea of strictly holding tight to the *sunnah* of the Prophet is considered an ideal among most Muslims. Among MAS masjids, the notion of strictness is less an ideal. Over 38 percent of MAS masjids respond "very well" to the question of whether they are strict in contrast to 59 percent of HSAAMs.

### Our Masjid is Strict in Following the *Sunnah*

|                 | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| High Strictness | 48%                             | 58%                          | 38%        | 59%          |

Masjid leaders were also asked about their approach to understanding the Quran and *sunnah*. The possible choices were: (1) literal approach, (2) contextual approach (an interpretation that takes into account the purposes of the Law and modern circumstances), and (3) traditional approach (follow the interpretation of one of the classical legal schools). African-

American masjids matched immigrant masjids in their responses to this question. Over 70 percent of both masjids follow a contextual approach. Only about one-fifth take a literal approach, and the traditional approach is negligible in masjids.

### Proper Approach to Islamic Decision Making

|   | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Refer to Quran<br>and <i>Sunnah</i><br>and follow<br>literal interpretation   | 23%                             | 21%                          | 19%        | 33%          |
| Refer to Quran<br>and <i>Sunnah</i> and<br>follow interpretation that takes into<br>account purposes of the Law and<br>modern Circumstances | 74%                             | 72%                          | 80%        | 63%          |
| Follow well-<br>established views<br>of a <i>mathhab</i>  | 3%                              | 7%                           | 1%         | 4%           |

Among historically sunni African-American masjids, however, there is a much larger number that follow the literal approach. One-third of sunni African-American masjids respond that they follow a literal approach as opposed to 19 percent of MAS masjids.

The conservatism of a portion of historically sunni African-American masjids is reflected in that 40 percent responded that women are not allowed to serve on their governing body. Only 8 percent of MAS masjids disallow women from sitting on the governing board.

### Attitudes Toward America

The dichotomy can also be witnessed in the response of African-American masjid leaders to the statements that "America is an immoral society" and "Muslims should participate in the political process." Exactly 66 percent of historically sunni African-American masjids respond that they strongly agree that America is immoral, while only 20 percent of MAS masjids strongly agree with that statement. Approximately 90 percent of MAS masjids strongly agree that Muslims should participate in the political process, whereas only 37 percent of historically sunni African-American masjids strongly agree. Clearly, the level of alienation and criticism of American society and politics is generally higher among historically sunni African-American masjids.

#### America is an Immoral Society (Percentage Agree or Disagree)

|                   | <u>All African-<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 38%                              | 24%                          | 18%        | 66%          |
| Somewhat Agree    | 31%                              | 43%                          | 42%        | 17%          |
| Somewhat Disagree | 27%                              | 26%                          | 36%        | 13%          |
| Strongly Disagree | 4%                               | 7%                           | 4%         | 4%           |

#### Religious and Educational Activities

The main religious function of the masjid is a place of prayer, in particular the Jum'ah Prayer on Friday but also the five daily prayers (*salah*). All the masjids in our study hold the Jum'ah Prayer—actually the definition of a masjid. The

majority of African-American mosjids are also open for the five daily prayers. The noon prayer (*Zuhr*) is held in the largest number of African-American mosjids (71 percent) and the evening prayer (*Isha*) is held in the least number of mosjids (63 percent). On the average, a total number of 44 worshippers attend these five prayers daily. Within the African-American mosjids, the MAS mosjids are open for the daily prayers less frequently than the historically sunni African-American mosjids. For the evening prayer, for example, 45 percent of MAS mosjids hold this prayer while 85 percent of HSAAMs are open.

African-American mosjids offer a diverse set of other activities, primarily educational in nature. The most frequent is Arabic classes (63 percent)—a clear indication of the thirst of African-American Muslims to access the authentic teaching of Islam. The second most frequent activity is an Islamic study class—61 percent of African-American mosjids regularly hold this class.

### Regular Masjid Activities

(Percentage of African-American mosjids that regularly conduct these activities)

#### Arabic Class

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| All African-American | 63% |
| MAS                  | 64% |
| HSAAM                | 65% |

#### Islamic Study Class

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| All African-American | 61% |
| MAS                  | 51% |
| HSAAM                | 72% |

|                                   |  |     |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----|
| Short Talk ( <i>khatirah</i> )    |  |     |
| All African-American              |  | 56% |
| MAS                               |  | 44% |
| HSAAM                             |  | 70% |
| Sisters Program                   |  |     |
| All African-American              |  | 54% |
| MAS                               |  | 55% |
| HSAAM                             |  | 49% |
| Weekend School                    |  |     |
| All African-American              |  | 49% |
| MAS                               |  | 62% |
| HSAAM                             |  | 35% |
| New Muslim Class                  |  |     |
| All African-American              |  | 53% |
| MAS                               |  | 37% |
| HSAAM                             |  | 46% |
| Youth Programs                    |  |     |
| All African-American              |  | 42% |
| MAS                               |  | 44% |
| HSAAM                             |  | 41% |
| Martial Arts/sports               |  |     |
| All African-American              |  | 30% |
| MAS                               |  | 25% |
| HSAAM                             |  | 34% |
| Quran Memorization/ <i>tajwid</i> |  |     |
| All African-American              |  | 30% |
| MAS                               |  | 22% |
| HSAAM                             |  | 43% |
| Parenting Program                 |  |     |
| All African-American              |  | 15% |
| MAS                               |  | 12% |
| HSAAM                             |  | 17% |



Compared to other religious congregations, churches have many more programs. For example, 98 percent of Black churches have Bible study outside Sunday and 96 percent have youth programs.

MAS masjid are much more likely to hold a weekend school than the historically sunni African-American masjids. And sunni African-American masjids are more likely to hold Islamic study classes and short talks.

### **Social Service and Community Activism**

African-American masjids are involved in their local communities in various social service efforts. Almost half (49 percent) have a high level of community involvement, which is defined as engaging in six - seven community activities. Only 13 percent of immigrant masjids have the same high level of involvement. Over 55 percent participate in interfaith social service projects. The activity in which the highest percentage of African-American masjids are involved is prison ministry—86 percent. More than 71 percent of African-American masjids are involved in social advocacy programs, including anti-drug or anti-crime programs.

### **Percentage of African American Masjids/Black Churches Involved in Social Services**

|                         | <u>African-American Masjids</u> | <u>Black Churches</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Prison Programs         | 86%                             | 62%                   |
| Social Advocacy         | 71%                             | 45%                   |
| Substance Abuse Program | 50%                             | 52%                   |
| Tutoring                | 47%                             | 65%                   |

Other social services, including giving away clothes, food and cash, and family counseling involve Muslims and non-Muslims. Over 82 percent of African-American masjids help non-Muslims in these efforts: 34 percent help as many non-Muslims as Muslims, and 48 percent help a lower number of non-Muslims. Immigrant masjids do little to serve non-Muslims in their social services.

**Percentage of Masjids That Served Non-Muslims  
Through Their Social Service Programs**

|   | <u>All African-<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes, helped but low number of non-Muslims | 48%                              | 35%                          | 48%        | 47%          |
| Yes, at least 50% were non-Muslims        | 34%                              | 10%                          | 38%        | 30%          |
| No-didn't help any non-Muslims            | 18%                              | 55%                          | 14%        | 23%          |

In comparing MAS and historically sunni African-American masjids, MAS masjids are slightly more involved. Over 56 percent of MAS masjids have a high level of community involvement, in comparison with 38 percent of historically sunni African-American masjids. Demonstrating a more conservative leaning, 37 percent of historically sunni African-American masjids participate in interfaith social service proj-

ects, as opposed to 71 percent of MAS mosjids. In terms of the specific services provided, MAS and historically sunni African-American mosjids are virtually the same, except in social advocacy programs in which 79 percent of MAS mosjids participate compared with 59 percent of historically sunni African-American mosjids.

### Community Involvement Index

|                           | <u>All African-<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Mosjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| High (6-7 activities)     | 49%                              | 13%                          | 56%        | 38%          |
| Moderate (3-5 activities) | 30%                              | 23%                          | 29%        | 30%          |
| Low (0-2 activities )     | 21%                              | 64%                          | 15%        | 32%          |

Both MAS and historically sunni African-American mosjids view themselves as being committed to social justice: 83 percent of MAS mosjids and 75 percent of historically sunni African-American mosjids agree that their mosjid is working for social justice. Black churches share the same sense of commitment to social justice: 78 percent describe their church as working for social justice.

However, a greater percentage of historically sunni African-American mosjids are more reticent about involvement in American society. While 93 percent of MAS mosjids strongly agree that Muslims should be involved, only 49 percent of historically sunni African-American mosjids strongly agree.

High levels of community involvement, interestingly enough, are not associated decisively with any factor. Mosjid size, growth, financial health, paid Imam, Islamic approach, etc., are not predictive of community involvement.

### Political Involvement

African-American masjids evidence a substantial degree of involvement, in politics. Masjids were asked if they had been involved in four possible activities within the last year: voter registration, visit of a politician to the masjid, writing or calling a politician, and writing or calling the media. The highest response rate was that 70 percent of African-American masjids had contacted a politician with the lowest response rate (53%) indicated a visit by a politician.

#### Percent Response of African American and Immigrant Masjids

##### Contacted Politician

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| African-American | 70% |
| Immigrant        | 58% |
| MAS              | 90% |
| HSAAM            | 46% |

##### Write the Media

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| African-American | 69% |
| Immigrant        | 70% |
| MAS              | 81% |
| HSAAM            | 57% |

##### Voter Registration

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| African-American | 60% |
| Immigrant        | 69% |
| MAS              | 56% |
| HSAAM            | 13% |

## Visit of Politician

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| African-American | 40% |
| Immigrant        | 30% |
| MAS              | 70% |
| HSAAM            | 32% |

Immigrant mosjids lag behind African-American mosjids in direct contact with politicians. Overall, political involvement is slightly higher in African-American mosjids than in immigrant mosjids.

**Percentage of Mosjids with High  
Level of Political Involvement\***

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| African-American | 26% |
| Immigrant        | 19% |
| MAS              | 38% |
| HSAAM            | 9%  |

\*High level is defined as engaging in all four political activities.

The most distinct differences between MAS and historically sunni African-American mosjids concern involvement in politics. A larger portion of historically sunni African-American mosjids distance themselves from political involvement—even more than immigrant mosjids.

Approximately 38 percent of MAS mosjids show a high level of political involvement, and only 9 percent of historically sunni African-American mosjids have a high level. While 90 percent of MAS mosjids strongly agree that Muslims should participant in the political process, only 37 percent of historically sunni African-American mosjids strongly agree.

### Muslims Should Participate in the Political Process

|                   | <u>All African-<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 66%                              | 75%                          | 90%        | 37%          |
| Somewhat Agree    | 11%                              | 18%                          | 3%         | 22%          |
| Somewhat Disagree | 10%                              | 5%                           | 4%         | 17%          |
| Strongly Disagree | 13%                              | 2%                           | 3%         | 24%          |

### Outreach

Outreach to non-Muslims in order to explain Islam is a prominent area of activity in African-American masjids. Masjids were asked about three possible activities: visiting a school or church to present Islam, participation in an interfaith program, and stressing the importance of inviting non-Muslims to Islam (*dawah*).

### Percentage of African-American/Immigrant Masjids Engaged in Outreach Activities in Past Twelve Months

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Stress inviting non-Muslims |     |
| African-American            | 95% |
| Immigrant                   | 90% |
| MAS                         | 99% |
| Historically sunni          |     |
| African-American            | 91% |
| Visit school/church         |     |
| African-American            | 81% |
| Immigrant                   | 67% |
| MAS                         | 86% |
| Historically sunni          |     |
| African-American            | 74% |

## Interfaith programs

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| African-American   | 78% |
| Immigrant          | 61% |
| MAS                | 93% |
| Historically sunni |     |
| African-American   | 59% |

The ideal of engagement in missionary-type work is strong in all masjids, especially African-American ones. Over 95 percent of these stress the importance of *dawah* in sermons and talks. Other outreach activities are well established in African-American masjids and less so in immigrant masjids. Over 70 percent of African-American masjids have a high level of involvement in outreach activities, and 51 percent of immigrant masjids have a high level.

MAS and historically sunni African-American masjids differ in this area also. While 86 percent of MAS masjids have a high level of outreach involvement, 50 percent of historically sunni African-American masjids do so.

### Outreach Index

|                         | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| High (all 3 activities) | 70%                             | 51%                          | 86%        | 50%          |
| Moderate (2 activities) | 17%                             | 22%                          | 7%         | 30%          |
| Low (0-1 activities)    | 13%                             | 27%                          | 7%         | 20%          |

A decisive factor is that 73 percent of historically sunni African-American masjids agree that America is hostile to Islam, while 33 percent of MAS masjids agree. Apparently, the greater alienation from America leads to a lower desire in certain historically sunni African-American masjids to engage in these more mainstream forms of outreach.

### American Society is Hostile to Islam

|                   | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 17%                             | 14%                          | 8%         | 30%          |
| Somewhat Agree    | 35%                             | 44%                          | 25%        | 44%          |
| Somewhat Disagree | 36%                             | 31%                          | 51%        | 17%          |
| Strongly Disagree | 12%                             | 11%                          | 16%        | 9%           |

### Organizational Structure

The Imam (minister) is typically the leader in the African-American masjid, but not in the immigrant masjid. In the Muslim world the Imam is usually the prayer leader and educator but not an administrator. He is usually an employee of the masjid or government that runs the masjid, and therefore decision-making is not in his hands. Immigrant Muslims have duplicated this structure. African Americans come from a culture where the religious leader is usually in charge of most aspects of the institution. There is no difference between MAS and HSAAM in this one aspect.

### Yes—Imam is Leader of the Masjid

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| African-American | 89% |
| Immigrant        | 23% |

Even when the masjid has a governing body (Masjlis ash-Shura), only in 23 percent of African-American masjids is this body the final decision maker. In 73 percent of immigrant masjids, the governing body has the final decision-making power.

Few Imams are paid a salary. Only 8 percent of African-



American Imams are paid and full-time; 7 percent are paid and part-time. A full 85 percent of African-American Imams are purely volunteers. More than 89 percent have outside employment. In comparison, 75 percent of ministers in the Black church and 83 percent in all congregations are paid and full-time. If there is one obstacle to the further growth of masjids, it is the lack of full-time Imams.

The average age of the African-American Imam is 50 years. Among Black ministers the average age is 54.

#### **Age of African-American Imams**

|       |     |
|-------|-----|
| 25-38 | 6%  |
| 40-49 | 40% |
| 50-59 | 44% |
| 60-82 | 10% |

The average tenure of African-American Imams is 12 years.

#### **Year Became Imam**

|           |     |
|-----------|-----|
| 1969-1979 | 11% |
| 1980-1989 | 33% |
| 1990-2000 | 56% |

Most African-American Imams have at least achieved some college in terms of secular education but little formal Islamic education. Only 4 percent of Imams have a formal Islamic education, meaning a BA or above. In comparison, 83 percent of Black ministers have at least a BA from a Bible college. Imams in HSAAMs have more Islamic education than MAS masjids but less secular education than MAS Imams. Approximately 10 percent of HSAAM masjids have Imams with at least a BA in Islamic Studies. But 77 percent of MAS Imams

have a BA or higher from a secular college. Immigrant masjids have many more Imams with a formal Islamic education: 53% of their Imams have at least a BA.

The fact that there is a sizeable number of African-American Muslims who have received degrees in Islamic Studies from Islamic universities and America universities, the conclusion is that African-American masjids are not hiring these graduates, most probably due to the inability to pay them a decent salary. Many of these Imams work as chaplains in the prison system.

### Highest Level of Education of African-American Imams

|                                | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| High School<br>diploma or less | 12%                             | 13%                          | 12%        | 10%          |
| Some college or<br>technical   | 31%                             | 10%                          | 20%        | 49%          |
| College degree                 | 41%                             | 40%                          | 53%        | 25%          |
| Graduate degree                | 16%                             | 37%                          | 15%        | 16%          |

### Highest Level of Islamic Education of Imams

|  | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Certificate                                      | 18%                             | 15%                          | 12%        | 28%          |
| BA from overseas<br>Islamic University           | 3%                              | 34%                          | 0%         | 8%           |
| MA or PhD in Islamic<br>Studies from<br>overseas | 1%                              | 15%                          | 0%         | 2%           |
| MA or PhD in Islamic<br>Studies from America     | 0%                              | 4%                           | 0%         | 0%           |
| None of the above                                | 78%                             | 32%                          | 88%        | 62%          |

### Finances

African-American masjids struggle financially. More than 71 percent indicate that their financial health is tight or in serious difficulty as compared to 44 percent of immigrant masjids. In Black churches, 36 percent indicate that their financial health is tight or in serious difficulty. Only one-fifth of African-American masjids say that their financial situation is better than in 1995. Almost one-third indicates that their financial situation is the same as in 1995.

### Financial Health of Masjids

|                          | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Excellent                | 8%                              | 17%                          | 12%        | 4%           |
| Good                     | 21%                             | 39%                          | 23%        | 21%          |
| Tight                    | 41%                             | 35%                          | 38%        | 43%          |
| Some, serious difficulty | 30%                             | 9%                           | 27%        | 32%          |

African-American masjids have extremely modest incomes. Over 76 percent have an income below \$40,000. While 30 percent of immigrant masjids have incomes over \$100,000, only 7 percent of African-American masjids have similar incomes. MAS and HSAAM masjids are virtually identical regarding income.

### Income of Masjids

|                 | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| 0-\$9,999       | 32%                             | 17%                          | 34%        | 32%          |
| 10,000-39,999   | 44%                             | 28%                          | 41%        | 46%          |
| 40,000-99,999   | 17%                             | 25%                          | 18%        | 16%          |
| 100,000 or more | 7%                              | 30%                          | 7%         | 6%           |

The modest income of African-American masjids is reflected in the fact that few African-American Muslim communities have built their own masjid building. One-third of African-American masjid buildings were purchased and only 4 percent were built as masjids. African-American masjids have passed the stage of storefronts, but few have built their own house of worship.

### Types of Masjid Buildings

|  | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Built by Muslims                           | 4%                              | 34%                          | 4%         | 7%           |
| Purchased                                  | 67%                             | 51%                          | 71%        | 61%          |
| Rented                                     | 26%                             | 11%                          | 24%        | 28%          |
| Room provided by<br>university or business | 3%                              | 4%                           | 1%         | 4%           |

Few African-American masjids have paid staff. Approximately 84 percent of African-American masjids have no paid, full-time staff and 73 percent have no paid, part-time staff. In comparison to all religious congregations, 17 percent do not have paid full-time staff, and 25 percent do not have paid part-time staff.

**Full-time Paid Staff in Masjids**

|     | <u>All African<br/>American</u> | <u>Immigrant<br/>Masjids</u> | <u>MAS</u> | <u>HSAAM</u> |
|-----|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| 0   | 84%                             | 45%                          | 85%        | 84%          |
| 1   | 6%                              | 33%                          | 4%         | 11%          |
| 2   | 2%                              | 9%                           | 2%         | 3%           |
| 3 + | 8%                              | 13%                          | 9%         | 2%           |

**Conclusion**

This study represents data from the *Mosque Study Project*, the most comprehensive survey of mosques ever to be conducted in the United States. The findings are part of the larger study of American congregations called *Faith Communities Today* coordinated by Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religious Research.

This report is derived from telephone surveys of a mosque representative conducted from March to September 2000. Over 160 questions were discussed, covering five basic areas of mosque life:

- Identity
- History, location, and building
- Programs
- Leadership and organizational dynamics
- Participate

Of the 1,209 most mosques counted, 631 were randomly sampled for the survey. This constitutes a completion rate of 66 percent. Characteristics of responding mosques can be assumed to be within 5 percentage points of those of the 1,209 mosques.

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