

Week 2

Culture and Race in the US as related to Islam

Aside from the terrorist stereotype another stereotype traces its roots back to the civil rights movement in the US. This has a much smaller impact today but still tinges our perspective toward militant Islam. Black Panthers, Nation of Islam, and Malcolm X loom large on the American mind for part of the image of Islam.

Remember Malcolm X?

He took the teachings of Islam and applied them to Black liberation/ Black power and redefined and built on the Nation of Islam.

Nation of Islam – not a geographic nation but a political group

Started in 1930's US and surfaced on US radar with Malcolm X and later Louis X who is now Louis Farrakhan.

Modern day Black Liberation

Our local famous/infamous rep Quanell X in Houston leader of the New Black Panther party is always on the evening news when an issue effects the black community usually something violent happening in Houston.

Malcolm X is Barack Obama's baby day

Yes, people have spent a lot of time trying to connect the two. For me, I think it is because of the history of Malcolm X being a scary, activist, Muslim figure. And connecting the two will finally make Obama the thing worthy of all the fears and suspicions.

BUT

I don't want to spend a bunch of time on black liberation except to highlight that we have two general perceptions of Islam that are not based the overwhelming majority of muslims. **Black militancy combined with Arab terrorism literally represents a fraction of fraction of the Islamic experience.**

Violence

We will look at violence in culture and Koran later in the series. I believe we should tread lightly if we generally equate Koran with violence as evidence of its deficiency. Our Old and New Testaments are replete with violence that is hard to swallow on it face. We understand the violence of the Bible in light of a covenant relationship, but that does not cut the mustard when outsiders look at the Bible.

*So when we hear commentators defending Islam as a peaceful religion – they are actually saying something true **today**.*

Caveat There are historical moment where Christianity and Islam can be viewed as terrorist organizations. Crusades, Inquisition, The Nazi collaborators in the German Church. Our Christian faith is a living, breathing 'thing' with warts and glory as well.

A relationship with Jesus implies a sense of growth and development. If we as a people weren't growing and changing then we would have to kill people for not showing up to church Sunday. Exodus 35:2.

Denominations?

Ummah

Refers to the Muslim community in general. Similar to talking about Global Christianity.

Sunni

Sunni Islam is the vast majority of the total Muslim population of the world ~80%. The word "Sunni" comes from the term Sunnah, which refers to the words and actions or example of Muhammad.

Shiite

Shia Islam, is the second largest denomination of Islam, after Sunni Islam ~15%. The followers of Shia Islam are called Shi'as but the terms Shiites or Shi'ites are also used.

Shia is short hand for follower of Ali (Shī'atu 'Alī), Ali was Muhammad's son in law and cousin.

Shia Islam holds that Muhammad's family, "the People of the House", and descendants, who are known as Imams, have special spiritual and political authority over the community.

Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the cousin and son-in-law of Islamic prophet Muhammad, Ali was also the first male who accepted Islam.

Sunnis consider Ali the fourth and final of the Rashidun (rightly guided Caliphs), while Shias regard Ali as the first Imam and consider him and his descendants the rightful successors to Muhammad, all of whom are members of the Ahl al-Bayt, the household of Muhammad.

Shiite and Sunni compared

Differences developed at the death of Muhammad. The primary question was --Who's rightfully in charge?

Sunni view – new leaders can be elected not necessarily related to the Muhammad. Abu Bakr ends up become the first leader/ Caliph. He was not related to Muhammad.

Shia view – The job of leadership should have gone to relatives. His cousin / son-in-law, Ali bin Abu Talib should have been the leader of the movement. *Today* this is still a sore spot for many.

Wahhabi

Small sect Wahhabism is a Sunni Islamic sect based on the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab, an 18th century scholar from what is today known as Saudi Arabia, who advocated purging Islam of what he considered impurities. He is a prophet or an extremist depending on who you talk to.

This movement got a nod from the now discredited book “Three cups of tea” written by Greg Mortenson. He supposedly had run ins with the Wahhabis of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Ibadi

Reform group from Oman. Started 60 years after Muhammads death. 75% of population in Oman is Ibadi.

Sufi

Sufism focuses on the mystical dimension of Islam. Another name for a Sufi is Dervish. They came to the Rothko Chapel years ago. Rumi is the most famous Sufi.

You could try to equate Sunni, Shiite, Wahhabi, Ibadi and Sufi as denominations but I think it is best just to think of them in their own terms. There are dozens of branches and sub-branches that is beyond this survey.

The Christian leadership succession story

James the brother of Jesus is the acknowledged leader of the Jerusalem Church. Much of his impact only shows up tangentially in the Acts of the Apostles and other NT books. But if Josephus, an 1st Century Roman/Jewish historian, is to be considered, James was a much more compelling figure than the bible lets on. Peter gets all the press.

We hear about James through Josephus who was a leader of the Great Revolt (66-73 AD), but quickly got on the “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” train when it became obvious that “resistance is futile”. He became a propagandist for the glory of Rome, but you can listen through the noise to find James. His reputation and strong leadership begin to peek through the smoke of the spinmaster Josephus. Jews, Christians, and Pagans all respected him.

- *Antiquities of the Jews* books 18 and 20. St. Jerome makes reference as well to James.
- Hegesippus in his fifth book of his Commentaries, writing of James, says "After the apostles, James the brother of the Lord surnamed the Just was made head of the Church at Jerusalem."

So while we rightly respect and honor Paul and Peter but there is much, much more to the story. Paul was answerable to James, Acts 21 and 22. Peter was initially under James’ authority. Peter would only become an leader within the empire after James’ murder. But even after death James and his piety and spirit filled leadership filled the hearts and minds of the people, Jews, Jesus followers and even Roman pagans.

James was the biological half brother of Jesus Christ was pious and most all the early Jesus followers affirmed his leadership of the Jerusalem church. The Jerusalem Church was the center of power. When James was executed everyone went a little crazy.

High Priest Hanan ben Hanan was appointed in the midst of imperial chaos. He took advantage by getting the Sanhedrin to rubber stamp James' murder for trumped up crimes.

This deeply offended "**those who were considered the most fair-minded people in the City, and strict in their observance of the Law,**" So his murder was offensive to Old School and obviously the Jesus followers he led.

Some even claim, like Reza Azlan, that his murder was the match that lit the rebellion that would ultimately lead to the Rome flattening Jerusalem. Remember Josephus was part of that rebellion until he thought living was better than dying.

Here is how Christianity struggled with early succession

The response to the chaos of James' was to excise the story of James and elevate Peter as the **always** leaders. His origin story begins to take a different shape.

When he was alive James spoke and it was authoritative. Remember Peter? he was part of the Jerusalem Council Acts 15 The center of power trickled from Jerusalem to Rome at the death of James. The trickle turned to a flood when the Temple was destroyed. *It should go without saying that the Holy Spirit is and was in charge. But I find it fascinating that this push and pull was present from the beginning.*

Some scholars argue that making James the "cousin" of Jesus and Mary the "ever-Virgin was an attempt to downplay James' role in the church and make seem like it was always, obviously Peter.

These struggles of succession take different particulars in Islam. But the story of James and Peter help us understand a little bit about how hard it was to figure who is in charge when a leader is lost. I hope the Shiia / Sunni struggle makes more sense in context.

Caliph, Imam, and what?

- Imam is a person who leads the prayer in mosque during Islamic gatherings and can also be leader to the mosque
- Caliph is head of state and the title for the leader of the Islamic Ummah, an Islamic community ruled by the Shari'ah
- Ayatollah means 'sign of God' only Shia – Iran 89% shia

- Grand Imam, Grand Mufti - highest title, highest authority in Islamic jurisprudence.
- Mujtahid – lawyer of Islam