

# “Muslim ballot box barbeque”: Muslim and national identities among Nigerian and Indian immigrants in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas after September 11

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Volume 8, numéro 2, décembre 2008

Être musulman en Occident après le 11 septembre

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/000367ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/000367ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Groupe de recherche diversité urbaine  
CEETUM

ISSN

1913-0694 (imprimé)

1913-0708 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Cordell, D. D. (2008). “Muslim ballot box barbeque”: Muslim and national identities among Nigerian and Indian immigrants in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas after September 11. *Diversité urbaine*, 8(2), 61–98.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/000367ar>

Résumé de l'article

Les attaques du 11 septembre 2001 à New York ont profondément marqué les musulmans aux États-Unis. À partir de l'analyse des profils démographiques régionaux et nationaux de la population musulmane du Nord du Texas aux États-Unis, cet article analyse son impact sur les vies de douze immigrants musulmans de l'Inde et du Nigéria à Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW). Suite à ces événements, ils ont exprimé des inquiétudes sérieuses, non seulement quant à la discrimination, mais même en ce qui a trait à leur sécurité physique. Ils restent néanmoins fidèles à leur foi, tout en étant des membres loyaux de leurs communautés nationales. Loin d'être aliénés à la société américaine, ils sont cependant étonnamment optimistes quant à leurs possibilités d'en faire partie, ainsi qu'à celles de leurs compatriotes Indiens, Nigériens et des autres musulmans. En fait, leur engagement auprès de la société en général, comme celui auprès de la communauté musulmane à DFW, s'est même intensifié depuis le 11 septembre.

**“MUSLIM BALLOT BOX BARBEQUE”:  
MUSLIM AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES AMONG NIGERIAN AND  
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SEPTEMBER 11**

**Dennis D. Cordell**

**Abstract / Résumé**

The attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York City profoundly affected Muslims in the United States. Set against national and regional demographic profiles of the Muslim population, this article analyzes its impact on a dozen Indian and Nigerian Muslim immigrants in Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW). Interviewed in an NSF study, they expressed serious concerns about discrimination and even their physical safety after the attacks. They remain both faithful Muslims and, at the same time, loyal members of their national communities. Far from being alienated from American society at large, however, they are surprisingly optimistic about their own ability, and the ability of their fellow Indians and Nigerians, and their fellow Muslims to be part of it. Indeed, their political and social engagement in the larger society, like that of their fellow Muslims in DFW, has even intensified since September 11.

Les attaques du 11 septembre 2001 à New York ont profondément marqué les musulmans aux États-Unis. À partir de l'analyse des profils démographiques régionaux et nationaux de la population musulmane du Nord du Texas aux États-Unis, cet article analyse son impact sur les vies de douze immigrants musulmans de l'Inde et du Nigéria à Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW). Suite à ces événements, ils ont exprimé des inquiétudes sérieuses, non seulement quant à la discrimination, mais même en ce qui a trait à leur sécurité physique. Ils restent néanmoins fidèles à leur foi, tout en étant des membres loyaux de leurs communautés nationales. Loin d'être aliénés à la société américaine, ils sont cependant étonnamment optimistes quant à leurs possibilités d'en faire partie, ainsi qu'à celles de leurs compatriotes Indiens, Nigériens et des autres musulmans. En fait, leur engagement auprès de la société en général, comme celui auprès de la communauté musulmane à DFW, s'est même intensifié depuis le 11 septembre.

**Keywords:** Immigration, Muslims, Dallas/Fort Worth, identity, incorporation.

**Mots clés :** Immigration, musulmans, Dallas/Fort Worth, identité, intégration.

## Introduction

The attacks of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Towers in New York City profoundly affected both immigrant and native-born Muslims in the United States. Set against brief demographic profiles of the Muslim population in the United States and Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW), the largest metropolitan area in Texas and the fourth largest in the country (PRB 2007), this article offers a “close reading” of the individual experiences of a dozen Nigerian and Indian Muslim immigrants in Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) following the attacks and how these events shaped their identities and sense of belonging as Muslims, as Nigerians or Indians, and as Americans.

Muslim immigrants have not responded in the same ways to the events of September 11, or 9/11, in American usage. In addition to the varied intensity of their commitment to Islam, the differences also grow out of other dimensions of their identities, such as race, ethnicity, and nationality. Muslim immigrants in the United States represent many ethnic and national communities. Like everyone else, they navigate among, combine, and on occasion consciously choose among varied facets of hybrid identities. Writing about Arab Americans, and their ethnic, national, and pan-Arab identities in relationship to the state and citizenship, for example, Nagel and Staeheli conclude that “the relationship [...] is complex, contingent and ever-changing” (2004: 20). Religion adds yet another column to this menu. After 9/11, Muslims in America found that Islam, and they as its followers, had acquired an unexpected and for the most part unwelcome political dimension. As Ugandan Muslim scholar Mahmood Mamdani, professor at Columbia University, said in a lecture in New York City in the fall of 2001, “[t]o bear an identifiably Muslim name then was to be made aware that Islam had become a political identity in post-9/11 America” (Mamdani 2004: xi).

The Indian and Nigerian Muslim immigrants whose experiences are the focus of this essay identify themselves in a variety of ways. Indian Muslims share a similar set of identities among themselves, as do Nigerian Muslims. Each group has constructed a common identity which is multi-faceted and seems to be consistent across the group. As Muslims, these Indians and Nigerians share a religious identity. Their experiences and perceptions confirm Mamdani’s observation that since September 11,

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being a Muslim has acquired a political dimension. Asked about their most important concerns for their respective communities, these Muslim Indians and Nigerians responded with concerns that grew out of being Muslims.

However, because they belong to different national, ethnic, and racial groups, they are also different. Asked about national identities, for example, how they felt about being Indians and Americans, or Nigerians and Americans, their answers closely resembled those of their fellow nationals who were not Muslims. Muslim Nigerians and non-Muslim Nigerians, as well as Muslim Indians and non-Muslim Indians, each emphasized that it is possible to combine their first national identity and their new American identity. Their concerns about ill treatment and discrimination because they were Muslims did not undermine adherence to their secular national identities as Indians and Americans, or as Nigerians and Americans. This sense of optimism about being able to be part of the American "nation," while at the same time expressing fear about the consequences of being a Muslim, helps explain why Muslims in America have not only maintained, but have indeed intensified, their engagement with the larger society and political culture in the wake of September 11.

These Muslim immigrants from India and Nigeria were part of a sample of 600 immigrants interviewed in an interdisciplinary research project on "Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis," funded by the United States National Science Foundation (NSF), in 2001-2005. The project aimed to construct social, cultural, political, and economic profiles of immigrants in the four counties in North Texas surrounding Dallas/Fort Worth to learn how and to what degree newcomers have become incorporated into American society.<sup>1</sup> The project focused on five groups defined by country of birth, or national identity: the Mexican community, by far the largest and oldest; the Vietnamese community, a refugee population that has been in DFW since the late 1970s; the Salvadoran community, a rapidly growing group whose early members arrived as asylees during the Salvadoran civil war; the Asian Indian community (from India, and not Pakistan), made up of "high end" immigrants with high levels of skill and education; and, finally, the Nigerian community, another "high end" group which also represents the "new" African immigration to the United States.

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The American Community Survey of the Bureau of the Census estimated the Asian Indian immigrant population in DFW to be 40,996 people in 2005; taken together with their American-born children, the Asian Indian community, then, probably numbered somewhat over 100,000 at that time. The same survey placed the Nigerian-born population at 7,923 that year; again, with their children, the Nigerian community totalled about 25,000 people (GUM 2005).

We collected quantitative and qualitative data from a purposive sample of 100 individual immigrants each in the Vietnamese, Salvadoran, Asian Indian, and Nigerian communities. Given their much larger overall numbers in DFW, we interviewed 200 Mexican immigrants. We also interviewed entrepreneurs in each community, as well as immigration attorneys, immigration judges, and other professionals who deal with immigrants. We attended community events hosted by immigrant associations and other organizations; we went to churches, temples, mosques, and other places of worship. For purposes of comparison, we also developed a telephone survey about immigration, and contracted for it to be administered to a statistically representative sample of 1,000 adult residents in the four counties, divided evenly between immigrants and the native-born. We collected ephemera in immigrant communities – handouts, flyers, posters, and newsletters. In addition, this essay draws from the scholarly literature on immigration and immigrants in DFW and elsewhere, and from newspaper articles culled from the *Dallas Morning News*.<sup>2</sup> Before turning to the Indian and Nigerian immigrants, let us situate them in the larger contexts of the Muslim population in the United States, Texas and DFW.

## Muslims in the United States, Texas, and Dallas/Fort Worth

The Muslim immigrants discussed in this paper are not a statistically representative sample of larger populations. Nonetheless, the significance of their experiences becomes clearer when placed in the context of larger Muslim populations. Sketches of the Muslim population in the United States include four dimensions: size, ethnic origin, national origin, and geographic distribution. All present problems. First, neither the United States government, nor the states, nor local governments, nor school districts collect official statistics on religious affiliation. This dearth of data makes it impossible to depict precisely either the size or the geographic distribution of the Muslim population. Hence, estimates

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of Muslim populations rely on surveys conducted by research centres and foundations, national Islamic organizations such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) or the American Muslim Council (AMC), or individual scholars. As for ethnicity, although the census asks people to identify their ethnicity, they are also asked to choose one or more categories from a list of “official” ethnicities (or identities) very much shaped by the particular history of racial and ethnic relations in the United States. Finally, although the census records place of birth, all but a few countries with significant Muslim populations are also home to people of other faiths. Data on national origin, then, may not easily be used as a proxy for religious affiliation.

Given the irregular sources of data and their problems, estimates of the size of the Muslim population in the United States vary widely. Based on research by Bagby, Perl, and Froehle (2001) and a survey by scholars at George Washington University in 2004, Abdo (2006) put the number of American Muslims at 6 million in 2006. Elliot (2007) concurred with this estimate, although she does not discuss how she arrived at her total. At the other extreme, the Pew Research Center (2007: 3) pegged the American Muslim population at 2.35 million in 2007, a figure calculated from its own survey and Bureau of the Census data on immigrant nativity and nationality.

Three fundamental characteristics of the American Muslim community, or *‘umma*, should also be noted. First, American Muslims are divided between native-born Muslims, a large majority of whom are African Americans, and immigrant Muslims. Second, the Muslim population appears to have grown steadily, although not extremely rapidly, in recent years – by about 50 percent between 1980 and 1991, but only 20 percent between 1991 and 2006 (Turner 1997; Stone 1991; Ba-Yunus and Kone 2004, 2006). Third, a breakdown by national or geographic origin illustrates the diversity of the American Muslim community. Muslims in the United States come from 80 countries (Abdo 2006: 63). Only Muslims who gather in Mecca and Medina for the pilgrimage come from more places of origin – and this multitude assembles only temporarily. The diversity of the Muslim population in the United States raises important questions – about internal divisions within the American *‘umma* or community, and about emerging pan-Muslim identities, a phenomenon particularly apparent in the second generation, among the children of Muslim immigrants (Abdo 2006; Karim 2007: 135-143).

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Data on the state-by-state distribution of the American Muslim population leads to four conclusions. First, the geographic distribution of the Muslim population in the United States appears to have been fairly stable between 1990 and 2002. However, the percentage of American Muslims who live in the ten states with the most Muslims dropped from 65 percent in 1991 to 50 percent in 2002. In 2002, then, half the nation's Muslims lived outside the top ten states, whereas only slightly more than a third did so in 1991. Hence, Muslims were somewhat more widely distributed across the country in 2002 than eleven years earlier (Ba-Yunus and Kone 2004, 2006; American Muslim Council, cited in *Muslim Yellow Pages 2001*; Gonzalez 2006; Lawrence 2006).

Finally, we come to DFW. Most estimates of the size of the Muslim population are provided by the region's numerous Muslim organizations (for a selection, see *Muslim Yellow Pages 2007*). In the course of conferences on the impact of the events of September 11 in North Texas, the local public radio station collected estimates and concluded that the Muslim population totalled between 150,000 and 200,000 people (KERA 2002: 21), or roughly four percent of the metropolitan area's population of 5,424,037 that year.<sup>3</sup> Among them are small numbers of Muslims from India and Nigeria.

## Indian and Nigerian Muslim immigrants in Dallas/Fort Worth

The dozen Indian and Nigerian immigrants discussed in this essay responded to the same interview schedule of 106 questions as the other 588 people interviewed in the NSF study. Some answers required choosing among a closed set of responses, while others were open-ended. Each questionnaire was administered by an individual researcher and required between two and four hours to complete. For this essay, I identified fourteen questions whose answers I thought would be useful for exploring the impact of the September 11 attacks on the Muslim immigrants. I then divided them into three groups (see Tables 1-6). The first eight questions provide background. Five elicit demographic characteristics; three others ask immigrants what year they immigrated to the United States, their annual income, and if they go to mosque regularly.

The two other sets of questions ask how, in what ways, and to what degree these Indian and Nigerian Muslim immigrants have incorporated

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themselves into American political life. Four questions elicit thoughts about being in the United States and about September 11. The last five questions focus more specifically on identity, asking people about immigration status, how much they participate in the American political system, if they identify as Americans, and whether they believe that they can be both Americans on the one hand, and Indians or Nigerians on the other. Tables 1-6 summarize the questions and report the immigrants’ responses. I begin with the Indians.

The Indian Muslims are all men, ranging from 30 to 52 years old when interviewed. They arrived in the United States between 1980, in the early years of rapid growth in the Indian diaspora, and 1998, at the height of the current, great “fourth wave” of immigration in American history. Three men reported individual incomes between \$75,000 and \$99,000 annually, while the fourth immigrant said that he made between \$50,000 and \$74,999. Therefore, they are all quite well off financially, particularly considering that three are married and their wives may work as well.

All four Indians go to mosque. The youngest, who is not married, said that he goes to any mosque, mainly to pray. Another man attends the Dallas Central Mosque in the Dallas suburb of Richardson. Sponsored by the Islamic Association of North Texas (IANT), it is the largest and most important mosque in DFW. Although the senior imam is Turkish, the mosque attracts a wide variety of Muslims. Its activities are also diverse – it is a cultural and social centre along with being a place of worship. The mosque often sponsors outreach programs to the larger community, including, as this man noted, a health fair with free medical check-ups for everyone, “not just Muslims.”

The two other Muslim Indians also go to mosque, but prefer institutions frequented mainly by South Asians. One goes very regularly to a mosque whose imams are also South Asian, and were educated at Islamic universities there. The mosque has a school, and also offers a broader social environment as well as a place of worship. The fourth Indian Muslim frequents a small mosque in Irving, another Dallas suburb. Its membership embraces 100 families who come from his part of North India. He described them as “*members of a small sect known for business skills.*” To emphasize the importance of the ethnic character of his mosque, the man remarked that he lives only a mile from the Dallas Central Mosque, but prefers to drive much farther to worship with people from his region of India.

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**Table 1. Muslim immigrants, Asian Indians, DFW, 2001-2005**

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
Date of Birth	1973	1960	1969	1952
Age	30	43	35	52
Sex	M	M	M	M
Residence	Frisco, TX	Grand Prairie, TX	Richardson, TX	Dallas, TX
Place of Birth	Maharashtra, India	Maharashtra, India	Attar Pradesh, India	Gujarat, India
Date of Arrival	1993	1988	1998	1980
Income	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999
Do you go to a mosque?	Attends any mosque that is convenient	Attends mosque frequented by South Asians with South Asian imams trained in South Asia	Attends Dallas Central Mosque, frequented by cross-section of DFW Muslim community	Attends mosque frequented by 100 families from his area in India who belong to the same subgroup
What are the most serious problems that Indians face here in the US?	Looking different. The community needs to branch out from high-tech to other areas - to the arts, for example. The glass ceiling makes it hard to break through to the top.	Since 9/11, his slight beard attracts attention; however, people at work have told him to let them know if he has problems; hate crimes after 9/11; America needs to change.	More inconvenience since 9/11. He knows Muslims who are US citizens who have left because they disliked the harassment. He has felt it a bit, but "you have to be patient."	Profiling since 9/11. Fellow Muslims ask him why he has no beard. They consider the beard to be a marker, and their right as a Muslim.
Do you think that Indians face serious problems of ethnic or racial discrimination? Have you personally experienced it?	Profiling is worse since 9/11, particularly when people find out that you are a Muslim.	Not serious for Indians as a group, probably because they are doing well economically, and are highly educated. As for him, he has a slight beard and since 9/11 people stare at him.	Maybe 20% have experienced discrimination. It is worse since 9/11. On the other hand, people at his office offered to take him to his mosque for prayers. They were "looking out for him."	No experiences or knowledge of discrimination.

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project "Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005."

**Table 1 (continued). Muslim immigrants, Asian Indians, DFW, 2001-2005**

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
Are you afraid of being arrested and deported?	Yes, particularly since 9/11. Laws are of some help, but still “no one looks out for [immigrants].”	No	No	No, but he thinks that the government has the right to deport someone if he or she has done something illegal.
How has the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 affected your position as an immigrant in the United States?	<p>It is more difficult to come out and say that “<i>I am a Muslim.</i>”</p> <p><i>“I have to be careful. I have to explain that the people who did this are extremists, like those who kill abortion doctors.”</i></p> <p><i>“It has made it easier for people in the US to discriminate more generally. [...] It was much easier before 9/11. There was general discrimination, but now it is targeted. There is this fear of outsiders, and of people who look different.”</i></p>	<p>He loved America before “<i>that incident,</i>” but things have changed. It was bad and he condemns it. Innocent people lost their lives, but he hopes that people understand that Muslims do not have that agenda. There are bad eggs doing this for material gain. No religion teaches you to kill.</p> <p>But the government needs to change their approach, and to try to understand the international context. It is not a noble cause in Iraq.</p>	<p>9/11 has had no effect on him personally, but some friends have been affected. When they travel, his wife wears a head-scarf, but that has not caused any problems yet.</p> <p>The US has to understand different cultures; it has not yet fully done so.</p> <p><i>“We equally hate extremists, but they should understand that not everyone is like Bin Laden. Some Christians do the same things, but Americans do not then condemn all Christians.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Now I am more fearful in the US. We came here to get away from terrorism and such [in South Asia], and now the world is getting closer every day. You are not immune to these things anywhere now. The US used to be a safer place.”</i></p> <p><i>“Overall, I am happy I came here. The US gives a better life to those who are willing to work hard. Just a few people run on hard luck and do not make it; but the majority achieve a better life.”</i></p>
Interviewer notes	As a Muslim, he clearly feels greater discrimination than do Christian and Hindu Indians interviewed. He noted that, had he not been a citizen, he would have had to register recently with the government.*			

\* Note: The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), implemented in 2003.

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project “Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005.”

The pattern of mosque attendance among this handful of Indian Muslims mirrors a characteristic of the larger American *‘umma*. The teachings of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) emphasize that the *Qur’an* is a revelation revealed to all humankind and that all Muslims belong to one community. Nonetheless, Muslims from the same or similar cultures and the same part of the world tend to identify with each other more than with Muslims from elsewhere and congregate together. While Abdo writes that only 7 percent of mosques in the United States are “ethnic” mosques, meaning that they cater exclusively to a particular ethnic group, in fact, 64 percent or nearly two-thirds are dominated by one group (Abdo 2006: 64, 175). Karim (2007) describes the same phenomenon among Muslims in Chicago, noting that differences in social class and race also contribute to such divides. Her study focuses on relations between African American and South Asian Muslims. Overall, African American Muslims are not as wealthy and tend to live in the city, while their South Asian co-religionists are solidly middle class and tend to reside in the suburbs.

To determine how the Muslim immigrants in the DFW study believe they are perceived by the host society, we asked them to identify the most serious problems facing their community, if they had experienced discrimination, and if they had heard of examples of discrimination affecting others. In talking about “*serious problems*,” all four Indian Muslims referred to September 11, suggesting that, for them, the aftermath of the attacks eclipsed whatever major problems the Indian national community faced earlier. They cited problems ranging from, as one man put it, “*looking different*,” to another immigrant noting that “*after 9/11*” people paid more attention to his “*slight*” beard. A third man responded in general terms, saying that there is “*more inconvenience since 9/11*.” However, he went on to underscore some concrete consequences of this inconvenience, including knowing “*Muslims who are US citizens who have left because they were not comfortable, and disliked the harassment*.” As for himself, however, he resolved “*to be patient*” in the face of such treatment. The fourth Indian Muslim responded more judiciously, but used politically and racially aware vocabulary, noting that “*profiling since 9/11*” is a serious problem.

Asked about “*serious problems of ethnic or racial discrimination*,” three of the four Indian Muslim immigrants immediately agreed that such problems existed, and also attributed them to September 11. Using

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political and racial vocabulary first formulated to talk about discrimination experienced by African Americans, the first man, who came to the US in 1993, said that “*profiling [is] worse since 9/11, particularly when people find out that you are a Muslim.*” A second Muslim responded more generally. Referring to non-Muslim as well as Muslim Indians, he noted that their higher economic and educational status had probably protected them as a group prior to 9/11. The third Muslim Indian suggested that a fairly large proportion of Indians probably experienced discrimination, and said that it had worsened since 9/11. However, he tempered his response by noting, too, that coworkers offered to take him to the mosque and were “*looking out for him.*” The fourth man denied experience or knowledge of discrimination.

The final question in Table 1 asked about deportation – a sanction to which the United States has turned with increasing frequency since September 11. Despite the fear that this threat arouses among immigrants in the United States generally, and among people from the Middle East in particular, only one Indian Muslim immigrant expressed concern about it. Even he noted that, “*laws are of some help.*” The other three immigrants replied that they were not worried about being deported at all, the last one adding that the government must reserve the right to deport people who have done something illegal to protect the society. This respondent, a former president of the Indian Association of North Texas (InANT), is more politically acute, which may explain why he put his answer in a context that would resonate with the US political context.

Finally, when asked specifically how the events of September 11 affected them, the immigrants’ answers underscored their profound impact. The first man said that it had become more difficult to admit to being a Muslim; moreover, when he did so, he felt that he had to turn it into a teaching moment, reminding those around him that extremists are found in their American society as well: “*the people who did this are extremists, like those who kill abortion doctors.*” He also believed that discrimination had become more “*targeted,*” noting that had he not been a citizen, he would have had to register with the government in accordance with the 2003 National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS).

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The second and third immigrants responded more globally, illustrating that September 11 has prompted them to think more critically about American society. One said that he loved America “*before that incident,*” and hoped that “*people understand that Muslims do not have that agenda.*” He went on to offer a critique of American policy: “*the American government needs to change their approach and to try to understand international opinion.*” The third man made similar comments; he said that September 11 had had no impact on him personally, although he wondered if his wife might eventually encounter problems since she wears a headscarf – a concern of Muslims across the country (Pew Research Center 2007). He then shifted to critique: “*the US has to understand different cultures. [...] We equally hate extremists, but they should understand that not everyone is like Bin Laden. Some Christians do the same things, but Americans do not then condemn all Christians.*”

The fourth Muslim Indian, the former president of the InANT, again was more judicious. Putting the events of September 11 in a broad context, he noted first that he has become more fearful, that “[*w*]*e came here to get away from terrorism and such, and now the world is getting closer every day. You are not immune to these things anywhere now.*” He then ended with a flourish praising the good life in America: “*The US gives a better life to those who are willing to work hard. Just a few people run on hard luck and do not make it.*”

Two issues of identity arise from these responses. First, while their “high end” economic status protected them and their community from discrimination prior to September 11, these Muslim Indians felt much more vulnerable after the attacks, both as Muslims and as Indians. Apart from having beards, which they believed identified them as Muslims, they were also aware that they resembled Arabs in physical appearance, which also targeted them. Their use of the term “*racial profiling*” underscores the fact that they also felt that their skin colour, which is similar to that of people from the Middle East, labelled them in ways that they could not change. In general, scholars agree that South Asians in the United States have been treated as white – unlike in Great Britain where they are regarded as black (Karim 2007). Since September 11, the Indian Muslims interviewed in DFW clearly feel more vulnerable due to skin color.

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**Table 2. Muslim immigrants, Asian Indians, DFW, 2001-2005**  
(*American identity and Indian identity*)

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
Date of Birth	1973	1960	1969	1952
Age	30	43	35	52
Sex	M	M	M	M
Residence	Frisco, TX	Grand Prairie, TX	Richardson, TX	Dallas, TX
Place of Birth	Maharashtra, India	Maharashtra, India	Attar Pradesh, India	Gujarat, India
Date of Arrival	1993	1988	1998	1980
Income	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999
Immigration status	Naturalized citizen, 2000	Naturalized citizen, 2000	H1-B Visa	Naturalized citizen, 1985
Would you say that you follow [US] politics very closely, fairly closely, or not much at all?	Follows “very closely”  Cares about party affiliation	Follows “very closely”  Does not care about party affiliation	Does not follow US politics much at all, does not care about party affiliation. Yet signed petition against the Patriot Act.	Follows “very closely”  Cares a great deal about party affiliation. He has supported Move-On, a political movement.
What are the most important rights? What are the most important duties?	Voting; participating in society	Voting, freedom of movement; reporting crime	Individual freedom, freedom of religion; obeying law, charity	Freedom of speech and religion; before 9/11, a more peaceful place than elsewhere
Identity: What does it mean to you to be an American?	<i>“Freedom is big; freedom to be who you are [...] within the limits of the law.”</i>	<i>“There is a lot of freedom here.”</i> <i>“America is the best place to live.”</i>  He likes the spirit of adventure here, which is why his son is in Boy Scouts.	The character of Americans: they are more tolerant, “even more than Indians.” “They like to try things. Indians do not like to try new foods and things.”	It means being free. He has great respect for the culture and society. You can be “part of society,” unlike the Middle East, where you cannot own.
Identity: Some people say you can be both American and Indian. Other people say that you have to choose between one and the other. What do you think?	<i>“It is possible. Being American does not mean giving up your background. The melting pot should not be what we aim for. Even the Jews and Italians and Irish have kept their own identities.”</i>	<i>“You can be both. You can take the best of both.”</i>  <i>“We have some good values [...] but it is also true of Americans. There is a high level of honesty and integrity in the US which other cultures lack, and we can learn from that.”</i>	There is an opportunity to be both. Will always visit India and support it. “You should not forget where you come from and you should try to help.”	<i>“You can be both. You take the best of both worlds. You are a better person if you take the good from both countries and give up nothing.”</i>

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project “Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005.”

These fears, tempered by acknowledgements of support, were also echoed among other South Asian immigrants in DFW, most of whom are not Muslim. For example, Baljeet Singh, a truck driver who is a Sikh, said that his *“life in the Dallas-Fort Worth area changed for the worse”* (Fuller and Hogan/Albach 2001). Other drivers started *“flipping him the finger,”* he presumed because his turban and beard led them to think he was a Muslim. In a much more serious incident, Waqar Hasan, a storekeeper from Pakistan, was shot to death at his Dallas store (Piloto 2001; Trejo 2004a, 2004b). Other Muslims such as Taghi Javidnia, the Iranian owner of the Sahara Restaurant in North Dallas, reported that *“many have gone out of their way to support us,”* but Muslims and non-Muslim South Asians across DFW, nonetheless, devised strategies to assure the majority that they were *“good Americans.”* Singh *“put an American flag on his truck’s antenna. He also hung American flags at his home.”*

Despite the clearly enunciated fears and criticisms of American society in the aftermath of September 11 recorded in Table 1, answers to the questions in Table 2 show that Indian Muslims are attuned to American politics, believe in political participation, and remain convinced that American society is a *“big tent”* that can take in everyone. They believe in the hybrid possibility of being American while remaining Indian. Three of the four Indian Muslims said that they follow American politics *“very closely.”* They are all naturalized citizens. Only the man holding a H1-B work visa does not follow American politics; however, even he signed a petition protesting the Patriot Act, which abrogated some civil rights after September 11. All expressed great commitment to individual freedoms (speech and religion), and underscored the importance of voting. In discussing what it means to them to be American, three of the four praised freedom, although it is difficult to grasp exactly how that shapes their own American identities. Three of the four also cited more concrete characteristics of American identity that they could adopt: the *“spirit of adventure,”* which one man hopes to transmit to his son through Boy Scouts; the tolerance and willingness to try new things, which another admires and contrasts with the reticence of his fellow Indians; and the possibility of being *“part of society”* by owning property, which the fourth man contrasts explicitly with restrictions in the Middle East where many Indian Muslim immigrants work.

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They also affirmed the possibility of being both Indian and American. Referring to the history of American immigration, one man explicitly said that immigration has always been about hybridity: *“Being American does not mean giving up your background. The melting pot should not be what we aim for. Even the Jews and Italians and Irish have kept their own identities.”* A second Muslim praised combining “the best of both.” He also suggested that the high level of honesty and integrity in American society be emulated. The other two immigrants were equally enthusiastic about being American and Indian.

What is perhaps most striking about the Muslim Indians’ comments on American politics, civil rights and duties, American identity, and hybridity is that none mentioned his Muslim identity or indeed Islam at all. Nor did they suggest that they felt alienated from American society, despite concern about discrimination. They interpreted the question as an issue of national identity, and not religious identity. They agreed that, despite the events of September 11, American national identity remains still broad enough for them to find a place in the United States. Before speculating about why this may be so, however, let us shift to the Nigerian Muslims for a comparative perspective.

The Nigerian Muslims in the NSF study included seven men and a woman, whose ages ranged from 42 to 54 when interviewed. They arrived between 1976, when many students from newly independent states in Africa came to study, and 1990, by which time their numbers had become significant enough for scholars and Africans themselves to begin talking about “the new African immigration,” or “the second African diaspora.” Two declared modest individual incomes (\$15,000-\$24,999 and under \$15,000). However, they also said that their household incomes were above \$100,000, suggesting that their spouses brought in additional revenue. One man declined to reveal his income. Overall, reported incomes ranged between \$24,000-\$34,999 and \$75,000-\$99,999. If accurate, the Nigerian Muslims’ average individual income is somewhat lower than that of their Indian co-religionists. Seven of the eight immigrants were married at the time they were interviewed. They lived in Dallas, Fort Worth, and suburbs scattered across the four-county region targeted by the NSF study. This distribution reflected the residential patterns of their non-Muslim countrymen and women.

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Table 3. Muslim immigrants, Nigerians 1, DFW, 2001-2005

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
Date of Birth	1953	1953	1954	1949
Age	50	50	49	54
Sex	M	M	M	M
Residence	Dallas, TX	Garland, TX	Fort Worth, TX	Fort Worth,, TX
Place of Birth	Illorin, Kwara state, Nigeria	Shaki, Oyo state, Nigeria	Benin City, Edo state, Nigeria	Sagamu, Ogun state, Nigeria
Date of Arrival	1990	1978	1976	1984
Income	\$24,000-\$34,999	\$35,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	Declined to declare income
Do you go to a mosque?	Attends Nigerian Muslim Association (NMA) mosque in Irving and Dallas Central Mosque (DCM)	Goes to NMA mosque and DCM. They sponsor many activities: trips, social gatherings, support groups, ecumenical meetings	Frequents a mosque near the campus at the University of Texas at Arlington; attends Potter House church in Dallas	Attends mosques of the Islamic Association of Tarrant County, NMA mosque of Tarrant County; he is an assistant imam
What are the most serious problems that Nigerians face here in the US?	Stereotyping all Nigerians as drug dealers.	Stereotypes about Nigerians being criminals. This is particularly problematic for him, since he deals in investment funds.	Stereotypes about <i>"being fraudulent polygamists and not being trustworthy."</i>  <i>"Living in economic and political limbo, because many Nigerians thought they were going home."</i>	Immigration issues are a problem. It is difficult to get papers to work. Also problems of adaptation. You must learn that all things done here are not good. You also must learn that you can change fields.
Do you think that Nigerians face serious problems of ethnic or racial discrimination? Have you personally experienced it?	<i>"No, no serious discrimination, even though we are sometimes told to take a black back to Africa."</i>	<i>"No, not serious, but racism is always there. Sometimes it is about being black [and not about being Nigerian per se], sometimes it is the other way around."</i>	Discrimination because of color and accent. But it is not as serious for Nigerians as for African Americans because Nigerians have more self-esteem. He pushed to create his own job at the KNON, the community radio station where he works.	Stereotypes that all Nigerians are deceptive. There was discrimination before 9/11. <i>"I have suffered discrimination frrequently. Clerks always check my credit cards, even when they check no one else."</i>
Are you afraid of being arrested and deported?	<i>"No, I was, until my immigration court case concluded in 1987"</i>	No	No	<i>"No, not at all"</i>

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project "Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005."

Table 3 (continued). Muslim immigrants, Nigerians 1, DFW, 2001-2005

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
How has the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 affected your position as an immigrant in the United States?	<i>“Yes, because I am a Muslim. I felt sad that the attackers were pictured as Muslims, rather than just terrorists. When the president said that all Muslims were not terrorists, I felt better.”</i>	<i>“It has affected me because of the link with Islam. The [Yoruba] mosque in Irving was attacked. The police did respond to the attacks. On the positive side, people do now know more about Islam. So it affected us as Muslims, not as Nigerians.”</i>	<i>“It affected me more than any American can imagine. It was an attack on the world. My mother was less than a mile away from the towers at the time, visiting my cousins. I could not get through by telephone. I thought my mother might have been killed, since it would have been obvious to visit the towers.” [She was ok.]</i>	<i>“I teach about Islam and now my students think that I am one of them [terrorists]. They are told that all Muslims are terrorists.”</i>  <i>“My daughter was deported because she did not have papers. She is now in Nigeria.”</i>
Interviewer notes		The events of 9/11 pushed many Nigerians to become US citizens - as a result of concern about the Patriot Act. The act also pushed many Nigerians into getting involved in the political process in the US.		The interviewee ran a 4-6 week Nigerian enrichment program for his children and his students. Now he offers another called “Nigerian Platform” for Nigerian Muslims. It lasts 2-3 days. The first time, it enrolled 137 people.

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project “Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005.”

Table 4. Muslim immigrants, Nigerians 2, DFW, 2001-2005

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
Date of Birth	1961	1961	1960	1953
Age	43	42	44	51
Sex	M	M	M	F
Residence	Plano, TX	Richardson, TX	Desoto, TX	Garland, TX
Place of Birth	Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria	Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria	Sagamu, Ogun state, Nigeria	Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria
Date of Arrival	1987	1981	1988	1978
Income	\$75,000-\$99,999	Under \$15,000 (Household \$100,000+)	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$15,000-\$24,999 (Household \$100,000+)
Do you go to a mosque?	Attends Collin County Masjid for Friday prayers; children go to Sunday school; has not gone to NMA mosque.	Goes to NMA mosque: Juma prayers (held on Sunday at NMA); he notes that he has a lot in common with people there.	Attends the Duncanville mosque, which is the closest. He goes to Juma prayers on Friday, closing his dental practice to do so.	Attends Spring Creek mosque, and the NMA mosque, whose activities include picnics and feast days. She has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.
What are the most serious problems that Nigerians face here in the US?	<i>"Racial discrimination -same as what African Americans face - and discrimination because of accent."</i>	Access to financial services and loans	None	<i>"Africans face a lot of discrimination."</i>
Do you think that Nigerians face serious problems of ethnic or racial discrimination? Have you personally experienced it?	He has encountered discrimination. Not being able to get a job in business is one of his major issues.	<i>"To a certain extent."</i> Nigerians are partly responsible, because some have acted improperly and broken laws. On the other hand, he has a travel agency, and recounted that when a white person opens the door and sees all black faces, they shut the door and never return.	He says that Nigerians do not face serious problems of discrimination. Nor has he encountered discrimination.	<i>"Yes. People do not want to promote Nigerians. They make things difficult so you will leave."</i> She is a pharmacist. She was always given the new people to train, and yet they never promoted her or gave her a raise. Many Nigerian women are under-employed.
Are you afraid of being arrested and deported?	No	No	No	No

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project "Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005."

**Table 4 (continued). Muslim immigrants, Nigerians 2, DFW, 2001-2005**

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
How has the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 affected your position as an immigrant in the United States?	He says that the attacks of 9/11 have not affected him.	<p><i>“It affected all of us. A bite was taken out of our freedom. We are no longer free, not even on an American passport. Our business has been affected by it. People do not travel as freely as they used to.”</i></p> <p>He went on to say that the discriminatory policies of the US will continue to bring destruction to the world. Waging war in Iraq does not spread democracy. <i>“The US is only 200 and some years old. How can they claim to know how to govern other countries that have governed themselves for thousands of years?”</i></p>	Immigrants see the matter differently than do the native-born, even African Americans. Immigrants are sorry that people died, but they are not sorry about the attack. This is because a lot of immigrants feel that the United States caused the problem. If you keep imposing selfish policies on the world, then what else can you expect?	<p><i>“It affected all people. That was a terrible occurrence. It affected the American economy, freedom, everything. It has also distorted the American perception of Islam.”</i></p> <p>She also recounted that she decided to make the pilgrimage in 2002. As she prepared to leave in February 2003, America prepared for war. On the pilgrimage, from a high point on Mount Arafat, she looked down and saw all people were equal, the poor and the billionaires. It was a life-changing event: <i>“All hate and jealousy left me that day. I came back with peace in my heart.”</i></p>

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project “Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005.”

All eight Nigerian Muslims go to mosque. All except one go to places with a mixed following – ranging from the Dallas Central Mosque (2) to places of worship in the southern Dallas suburb of Duncanville (1), the northern suburb of Plano (1), Collin County north of Dallas County (1), Fort Worth (1), and Arlington, between Dallas and Fort Worth (1). One man goes exclusively to a mosque sponsored by the Nigerian Muslim Association (NMA) in Irving (Abdullah 1997). Four others go to both the NMA mosque and others with a more diverse membership. Most go to the NMA mosque on Sundays for communal prayers (*jum'a*) and fellowship, some after praying at the Dallas Central Mosque on Fridays.

The NMA mosque also runs a “Sunday school” for children. Although the membership is mainly Yoruba from Nigeria, other African Muslims attend, along with a few African Americans. The Nigerian Muslim woman notes that she often goes to the Spring Creek Mosque in Plano to pray because it is convenient to her home, but she also attends the NMA mosque because it allows her to be in contact with other Yoruba.

Whereas the four Indian Muslims, then, are divided between those who go to mosques frequented mainly by South Asians and those who go to the more diverse Dallas Central Mosque, the Nigerians, more often than not, attend two mosques, the “Yoruba” mosque in Irving, as well as others with more varied clienteles. This difference may or may not be significant, because the small size of the NMA mosque precludes the menu of activities and services available at larger institutions. The South Asian Muslim population in DFW is much larger, including Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans as well as Indians, suggesting that South Asian mosques are often larger and offer a wider array of programs and services.

Queried about the most “*serious problems*” facing their national community, Nigerian Muslims, like the Indians, most often responded with concerns about stereotypes. However, the stereotypes they mentioned derive from racial discrimination based on their dark skin color—the “*same as what African Americans face*.” They also were disturbed by negative images attributed to Nigerians: accent, “*stereotyping all Nigerians as drug dealers*,” “*stereotypes about Nigerians being criminals*,” or “*fraudulent polygamists*.” The imam of an African mosque summed up the problem: “*racism is always there. Sometimes it is about being black [and not about being Nigerian per se], sometimes it is the other way around*.” With a couple of exceptions, nearly all said that they had personal experience with discrimination. The Nigerian woman charged job discrimination in pharmacy employment – also reported by non-Muslim Nigerian women in the NSF study (Cordell 2007). Two men said that their experience was not “*serious*.” Another offered a thoughtful comparison with the African American experience that makes allusion to African images of American blacks: “*But it is not as serious a problem for Nigerians as for African Americans because Nigerians have higher self-esteem*.” None feared deportation.

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It is striking that none of the Nigerian Muslims even raised the issue of September 11, while all the Indian Muslims did so. Given the characteristics of racism in American society, this is perhaps not surprising. Both groups are concerned about appearance and profiling; but the Indians are concerned about being identified with a stereotype of a “*Middle Eastern Muslim terrorist*,” while the Nigerians must contend with the stereotypes of African Americans that are deeply embedded in American society. Despite September 11, combating these distorted images remains the Nigerian Muslims’ “*most serious*” challenge (Cordell 2007).

Seven of the eight Nigerian Muslims said that the events of September 11 had, nonetheless, affected them as immigrants. Five responded with heartfelt, yet general statements that did not implicate them individually. One man said that he felt bad when he learned that the attackers were Muslims, but was relieved when President Bush affirmed that all Muslims were not terrorists. Another noted that the attacks undermined everyone’s freedom, and had a particularly negative impact on his travel business. A third man was worried not so much because he was a Muslim, but rather because his mother was visiting New York City and he thought she might have been at the World Trade Towers when the planes struck. The Nigerian woman said that “*the attacks distorted the American perception of Islam.*”

Two men did signal an individual impact on them as Muslims, but the implications were related to their professional roles. One is an imam at the NMA mosque, which was vandalized after September 11. His response was remarkably sanguine. He noted that the police responded to the vandalism by posting a guard at the mosque, and went on to say that “*people do now know more about Islam*” as a result of September 11. The other man teaches religious studies at a school in North Texas, and worried that “*my students think that I am one of them. They are told that all Muslims are terrorists.*” Ultimately, however, the attacks provoked him to take action. He launched an enrichment program for Nigerian Muslims in 2003 that enrolled over a hundred people; when interviewed in 2004, nearly twice that number had signed up for the next session. Several immigrants said, too, that September 11, and the passage of the Patriot Act security legislation in particular, had prompted many Nigerians, Muslims and non-Muslims, to become citizens and get involved in politics to protect their status in the United States.

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Two Nigerian Muslims offered analyses of how American policies in the world had perhaps set the stage for the attacks: *“If you keep imposing selfish policies on the world then what else can you expect,”* or, *“the discriminatory policies of the US will continue to bring destruction to the world.”* This latter man linked the events of September 11 with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, observing that, *“waging war in Iraq does not spread democracy.”* Perhaps most poignant was a situation described by the Nigerian woman. She was preparing to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in early 2003, as the United States was readying for war in Iraq. In Arabia, on Mount Arafat, she experienced an epiphany that changed her life. Looking down on thousands upon thousands of pilgrims all wearing white, she saw that *“all people were equal,”* whatever their social standing and wealth: *“All hate and jealousy left me that day. I came back with peace in my heart.”* Ironically, she returned to a United States at war in the Muslim world.

Turning to questions of political incorporation, civic responsibility, and identity, the Nigerian Muslims responded much the same way as the Muslim immigrants from India. All except the woman reported that they followed United States politics very closely. All but one are now citizens; the other is a permanent resident. Four became citizens in the 1990s – several after many years in the United States. Their decisions to naturalize may have been an initiative to secure their status following a rise in anti-immigrant feeling in the United States beginning in the 1990s and the establishment of more restrictive immigration laws in 1996 (Daniels 2004: 244-246). Three others naturalized in 2000 and 2002. Asked to identify civil rights and duties, the Nigerians responded in ways closely resembling the Indians, and not much differently from the other immigrants in the DFW study and native-born Americans (Brettell 2006). They expressed enthusiasm about the right to vote and freedom of speech, while underlining the duty to obey the law, give back to the community, be a good citizen, and pay taxes.

In terms of identity, *“being an American”* represented, more than anything else, potential and hope, rather than either becoming someone different, or adding a fundamentally different dimension to their identities. The seven Nigerians who responded to the question of whether one can be both American and Nigerian said that it is possible to be both. Some were emphatic: *“You can be both. You don’t have to choose. I want both.”* Others interpreted the question in geographical terms, noting that it is possible to contribute to society in Nigeria as well as in the United States.

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**Table 5. Muslim immigrants, Nigerians 1, DFW, 2001-2005**  
(*American identity and Nigerian identity*)

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
Date of Birth	1953	1953	1954	1949
Age	50	50	49	54
Sex	M	M	M	M
Residence	Dallas, TX	Garland, TX	Fort Worth, TX	Fort Worth, TX
Place of Birth	Illorin, Kwara state, Nigeria	Shaki, Oyo state, Nigeria	Benin City, Edo state, Nigeria	Sagamu, Ogun state, Nigeria
Date of Arrival	1990	1978	1976	1984
Income	\$24,000-\$34,999	\$35,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	Declined to declare income
Immigration status	Naturalized citizen, 2000	Naturalized citizen, 1994	Permanent resident, 1986/2004	Naturalized citizen, 2002
Would you say that you follow [US] politics very closely, fairly closely or not much at all?	Follows “fairly closely” Cares about party affiliation	Follows “very closely” Cares a great deal about party	Follows “very closely” Cares more about issues than party	Follows “very closely” Cares particularly about how candidates deal with Muslims and Africans
What are the most important rights? What are the most important duties?	Voting, freedom of speech, freedom of travel; pay taxes, fulfill civic responsibilities	Freedom of speech and religion; must be good citizen, uphold the law, follow rules	Freedom of expression, religion, and “supposedly” association; upholding Constitution, rights	Freedom of speech, writing what I want, voting; must educate and contribute
Identity: What does it mean to you to be an American?	<i>“Seeing how a society can be made to be better, to learn how to be a better Nigerian, so I can use my American expertise.”</i>	<i>“I am proud to be an American.”</i>	<i>“To be free and promote liberty, justice for all regardless of race, religion, creed.”</i>	<i>“To get a good job, to help others, to do my research.”</i>
Identity: Some people say you can be both American and Nigerian. Other people say that you have to choose between one and the other. What do you think?	<i>“Both at same time. The reality is that nothing stops you from being both.”</i>	<i>“You can be both. When we go to Nigeria, we want to be part of things there. We mix and do things. We also find ourselves defending the role of the US in Nigeria and defending the US invasion of Afghanistan.”</i>	<i>“You can be both: multiple personalities. I am a Benin man, a Nigerian, a man colonized by the British, educated in the US. What the hell am I? There is a certain sense of alienation from Africa. Maybe Africans are trying to be too many things. What am I?”</i>	<i>“You can be both. Being in US means contributing here, but we are also contributing there.”</i>

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project “Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005.”



**Table 6. Muslim immigrants, Nigerians 2, DFW, 2001-2005**  
*(American identity and Nigerian identity)*

Interviewee	I	II	III	IV
Date of Birth	1961	1961	1960	1953
Age	43	42	44	51
Sex	M	M	M	F
Residence	Plano, TX	Richardson, TX	Desoto, TX	Garland, TX
Place of Birth	Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria	Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria	Sagamu, Ogun state, Nigeria	Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria
Date of Arrival	1987	1981	1988	1978
Income	\$75,000-\$99,999	Under \$15,000 (Household \$100,000+)	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$15,000-\$24,999 (Household \$100,000+)
Immigration status	Naturalized citizen, 1994	Naturalized citizen, 1996	Naturalized citizen, 1996	Naturalized citizen, 2000
Would you say that you follow [US] politics very closely, fairly closely or not much at all?	Follows "very closely"  Cares more about programs and policies than about party	Follows "very closely"  Cares a great deal about party	Follows "very closely"  Cares a great deal about party	Does not follow "much at all"  Does not care about party
What are the most important rights? What are the most important duties?	Freedom of speech, and to do as you wish within law;  Obey the law, respect others	"The freedom to progress"; giving back to the community and helping others.	"The economic opportunities";  Voting	Freedom and education;  Obeying the law
Identity: What does it mean to you to be an American?	"For me it represents opportunities to live without persecution and with a full bill of rights, which is key for me."	"To be an American gives you freedom and hope. There is always hope."	"It only means the right to vote and the opportunities available."	"An American is a person with freedom of speech. There is more freedom of speech [...] than in any other in the world."
Identity: Some people say you can be both American and Nigerian. Other people say that you have to choose between one and the other. What do you think?	"You can be both. Why not? It allows you to support the policies you believe in."	"I can be both. I caution newcomers to save money so that they can retire comfortably in Nigeria."	"You can be both. You don't have to choose. I want both."	No answer recorded

Source: Immigrants interviewed for the NSF research project "Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis, 2001-2005."

A Nigerian immigrant who goes to both mosque and church and who describes his religion as “*Chrislam*,” offered the most colorful, and perhaps even the most thoughtful assessment of the hybridity of being a Nigerian immigrant and being American:

*“You can be both. I am a Benin man, a Nigerian, a man colonized by the British, educated in the US. What the hell am I? There is a certain sense of alienation from Africa. Maybe Africans are trying to be too many things. What am I?”*

Like the Indian Muslim immigrants, none of the Nigerian Muslims mentioned their Muslim identity or even the events of September 11 in answering questions about civic incorporation, rights and duties, and national identities. September 11 had a less personal impact on the Nigerian Muslims than it did on the Indians. As with the Indians, they did not believe that being a Muslim precluded finding a place in American society. While issues of racism are of great importance, they apparently do not feel that discrimination due to being black excluded them from American society. Indeed, given the African American struggle for civil rights, the Nigerian responses to other questions suggest that they may indeed even incorporate the fight for racial equality itself into their notion of an American identity.

This “close reading” of the impact of 9/11 on a dozen people does not pretend that their experiences replicate those of all other Muslims. However, a survey of the larger context shows that the experiences and reactions of these Indian and Nigerian Muslims are certainly indicative of how many other Muslims “lived” the aftermath of September 11 in North Texas.

### **September 11 and larger Muslim communities in Dallas/Fort Worth**

The broader Muslim community in DFW feared and felt hostility after September 11, while at the same time noting that non-Muslims also expressed sympathy for their plight. Like the Indian and Nigerian Muslim communities, other Muslim groups also responded to the crisis by reaching out to the DFW community in an effort to teach other Americans, immigrants and native-born alike, about Islam. In this sense, this dual reaction in the larger Muslim community reproduced the two

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responses of Indian and Nigerian Muslims already discussed. Muslims in general felt threatened, but still felt enough a part of American society to believe that education and political action would lead the majority community to develop more positive images of, and attitudes about them. KERA (2002: 5) summarized this double Muslim response in a report on roundtables it sponsored several months after the attacks:

*“Muslim-American communities faced a mix of responses from non-Muslims, some of whom vented their frustration by verbally or physically attacking families and businesses. Many Muslims retreated from the public eye out of safety concerns. Meanwhile, many other Muslims received support and comfort from sympathetic non-Muslims and in turn began efforts to educate the general public about Islam”.*

The report (KERA 2002: 21) offers specific examples from the proceedings of the roundtable on “Families, Education & Community,” noting that on September 11 “some Muslim school children were blamed by schoolmates,” and “[s]ome Muslim homes were targeted.” In addition, “Islamic places of worship were vandalized – some were even shot at, and on one college campus, a mosque was set on fire.” At the same time, “non-Muslim volunteers for the Dallas Peace Center escorted Muslims while shopping. On September 13, Dallas churches staged an interfaith gathering.” In an effort to reach out, “[i]n one stance, the region’s Middle Eastern communities released a joint press release that challenged the North Texas community to begin talking about issues that divide Muslims and non-Muslims.”

The fear that many Muslim immigrants felt after September 11 is reflected in anxiety about immigration. Successive editions of the *Muslim Yellow Pages* offer a useful index of these concerns. In 1996, the directory included five listings for immigration attorneys in the yellow pages, three full-page and two half-page advertisements, and two advertisements on heavy white paper with colour copy. In the 2001 edition, published before September 11, nine immigration attorneys appear in the yellow pages, followed by five full-page and four half-page advertisements. Law firms figure prominently in ads on heavy paper with colour print at the front, middle, and end of the volume, and the back cover features an attorney. By 2007, both the number of attorneys and their exposure had nearly tripled to 24 listings, accompanied by four full-page advertisements for one law firm alone, 19 single-page ads for other firms, two half-page ads, and nine full-page ads on heavy white paper with colour print. Again, an immigration attorney offers

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his help on the back cover (*Muslim Yellow Pages* 1996: 70-74; 2001: 74-80; 2007: 11-35). The firm Modjarrad & Abusaad, which ran the four full-page ads, has also taken to mass postcard mailings exhorting addressees to “Protect Your Immigration Rights Today,” and offering services in Spanish, Arabic, Farsi, and Vietnamese.<sup>4</sup>

Muslim immigrants and other immigrant groups in DFW also responded by intensifying efforts to reach out and become part of the larger society. The KERA report noted that, “three weeks after September 11, 28 religious and ethnic groups hosted a solidarity meeting.” Held on October 7, this event was sponsored by Dallas International, now called DFW International ([www.dfwinternational.org](http://www.dfwinternational.org)), an association whose members include several hundred immigrant and ethnic associations. National immigrant groups also sponsored memorial services. The Dallas International website posted a “Special Solidarity Announcement” by “The Nigerian Community” in DFW urging people to attend a candlelight vigil at the Dallas City Hall on September 21. The InANT, representing immigrant and American-born Asian Indians in North Texas, organized a prayer service in downtown Dallas on September 30 for victims of the September 11 attacks and raised funds for their families (*Dallas Morning News*, September 30, 2001).

The KERA panelist might also have cited examples of Muslim outreach. The DFW chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations ([www.cairdfw.org](http://www.cairdfw.org)) marched “against terrorism” on October 20, 2001. The flyer announcing the event featured an American flag very prominently, and called on Muslims, “In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,” to “Please join us to express that Muslims are against terrorism and against killing innocent people everywhere.” The rally was held at the memorial to John F. Kennedy in downtown Dallas, built to promote peace and condemn violence. It would be difficult to choose a more patriotic and politically aware site anywhere in DFW.

The Dallas Central Mosque also sponsored open houses and other events. An electronic mail invitation to a gathering on September 23, 2001 invited people in DFW to “Know our American Muslim Neighbor and express solidarity.” It promised “something for the kids” and “material on Islam.” About 2,000 people showed up (Gould 2001). Members of the mosque greeted guests with bumper stickers proclaiming “God Bless

America” and “United We Stand,” each emblazoned with an American flag. The mosque affirmed that its members were part of America, and its leaders acted confident that visitors could be persuaded to see them as such. Tours took people through the mosque, visiting worship areas and the gymnasium where they were given copies of the *Qur'an*. Tour guides also invited people to view a film, “Focus on Islam,” meant to dispel stereotypes. In a question-and-answer session, a guide emphasized that, *“Islam is about peace, and that the terrorist acts of September 11 cannot be accommodated to the teachings in the Qur'an.”* The mosque held another open house on October 13. Mohammed Sulayman, president of the IANT, explained their goal: *“If we don't explain Islam correctly, people like Osama bin Laden are going to explain it, which is very bad”* (Hogan/Albach 2001). Another large crowd came, and Imam Yusuf Kavakci was surprised at the high level of interest. Visitors came for assurance as well as information. Mary Woods, for example, said that, *“I just needed assurance that Islam is not a religion that makes it OK for people to fly planes into buildings”* (*ibid.*).

These efforts to embrace the non-Muslim community in DFW in the wake of September 11 suggest that Muslims and their leaders indeed felt that they belonged to American society. The open houses were social and cultural events with a political purpose. They were classic examples of American political activism. Like the Indian and Nigerian Muslims, Muslims in the larger community felt threatened and experienced retribution and discrimination. However, also like the Indians and Nigerians, they responded by emphasizing that they, too, were of America.

These efforts in 2001 did not spring from a void. The Dallas Central Mosque has a history of community outreach. Since 1996, the mosque has held an annual health fair where Muslim physicians offer free exams and screenings to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. In 2000, the gathering drew hundreds of people (Horner 2000b). In November of that year, the IANT, which operates the Dallas Central Mosque, launched a free community health clinic open to all, regardless of religion (Holland 2001). Muslim voter registration drives also preceded September 11. The American Muslim Political Coordination Council sponsored a campaign in 2000. The chair of the Council, Syed Ahsani, a retired ambassador to Pakistan who lives in DFW, noted that, *“they [Muslims] are getting politically conscious. With 6 million to 8 million people, [...] we can influence the political process in a positive way. We would like to make a*

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*positive contribution*” (*idid.*). Osama Abdullah, then president of IANT, explained why:

*“We have seen a transformation of attitudes in the Muslim community toward political participation. [...] We have seen people gradually over the years believing in political participation and voter registration as the only way for change and for getting our rights back. Before, some thought they had no chance.”*

Azhar Azeez (2000), vice-president of CAIR-DFW in 2000, suggested that, *“Islam finally is beginning to gain recognition and understanding – prerequisites to a slow but inexorable acceptance into the collective fabric of mainstream American society.”* Given these earlier efforts, and despite the negative personal fallout, September 11 has propelled the Muslim community in DFW to greater political and social incorporation. The Muslim community has sustained these efforts. In June 2002, the IANT sponsored a symposium on “Islam: Contemporary Issues.” In October 2002, more than 400 local Muslims and non-Muslims gathered at Southern Methodist University for a two-day conference on “Islam in North Texas” (Center for Southwest Studies 2002; Seddelmeyer 2002). In 2003 and 2004, the DFW chapter of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) also hosted meetings exploring topics such as “Better Muslims for a Better America” (Weiss 2003a, 2003b), and “American Muslims: Loving Our Country, Living Our Faith” (Kovach, 2004). Voter registration drives in the Muslim community have continued, sometimes combined with the celebration of Islamic observances such as the Eid al-Adha, marking the end of the pilgrimage (Michaels 2002; Stewart 2004). And, in a memorable display of hybridity, the American Muslim Alliance hosted a “Muslim Ballot Box Barbeque,” at Texas Stadium, home to the Dallas Cowboys football team, known locally as “America’s Team” and an iconic site for DFW’s non-Muslim majority (Michaels 2002).

This dual project, reinforcing Muslim identity while at the same time participating in the larger life of American society, extends well beyond DFW. Ansari (2004: 260) describes the challenge facing all Muslims in the United States:

*“The effectiveness of American Muslims in playing the dual role of strengthening their identity and constructively participating, like all other citizens of the United States, in the national enterprise of America – ceaseless striving for a better tomorrow – will largely depend on the extent to which American Muslims are able to develop a sound vision of their role in the United States and to close their ranks and create greater cohesiveness.”*

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## Conclusion: Religion, race, and nationality and ethnicity

Religion, race, and nationality and ethnicity are all influential factors in determining to what degree and in what ways immigrants become incorporated into their new homelands. Each of these characteristics may serve as either an incentive or an impediment to integration. They may become borders separating people and groups, or they may provide occasions for crossings between immigrant groups or between immigrant and native-born communities (Brettell 2007). Moreover, the ways in which these characteristics interact may well change over time as immigrants negotiate shifting circumstances. The experiences of the Muslim Indians and Nigerians explored in this essay illustrate how these factors may interact.

The role of religion in immigrant incorporation in the United States is by no means a new topic.<sup>5</sup> Islam and Muslims have largely been absent from this discussion. Until the late twentieth century, most Muslims in the United States were native-born African Americans. Since the immigration reform act of 1965, however, the arrival of increasing numbers of Muslim immigrants from a large number of countries has introduced Islam into American society in a prominent way. Moreover, the growth in Muslim militancy around the world, brought home to the United States by the attacks on the World Trade Towers in 1993 and 2001, has also led non-Muslim Americans, both native-born and immigrants, to become more aware of the presence of Muslim immigrants.

The Muslim Indian and Nigerian immigrants interviewed in our DFW project clearly feel part of the larger American *umma*. They are aware of the variety of Muslim communities in the region; some of the Indians and all of the Nigerians attend prayers at the Dallas Central Mosque, where Muslims from many countries pray together. When asked if the attacks of September 11 had affected them as immigrants, they all responded first as immigrant Muslims. Nonetheless, other characteristics led the Indians and Nigerians to frame their answers differently. The Indian Muslims felt more personally threatened, because their skin colour and cultural practices such as wearing a beard led to them being stereotyped as Middle Eastern Muslims, who were identified with the September 11 attacks.

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The Nigerians answered the question about September 11 as Muslims, too, but their responses were less personal. They were concerned about the negative image of Islam and Muslims that the events produced. They emphasized that Islam did not promote or accept violence. They did not express worry that they would be identified personally as Muslims because of physical characteristics or cultural practices. The two immigrants who said that they would be identified as "terrorists" were a professor of religious studies who was a Muslim, and a leader of a mosque. They felt threatened because people around them knew that they held these positions, not because they fit a stereotype of Muslims.<sup>6</sup>

Race is a visible difference between the Muslim Indians and Nigerians. Their different experiences and concerns in the wake of September 11 stemmed in significant measure from their different skin colours. Indians feared retribution because they resembled those from the Middle East responsible for the attacks. Nigerians were not so "racially profiled," and did not feel threatened by anti-Muslim individuals and groups. They did identify their skin colour as one of the major challenges facing their group, but that was because they worried about being subjected to the prejudices experienced by African Americans and not Middle Eastern Muslims.

As Brettell (2007: 3-10) points out, race has not historically occupied a critical position in theoretical discussions of immigration in the United States. In the American context, "race" has alluded to the divide between white and black, the infamous "colour line" of W. E. B. DuBois (1989 [1903]). With the end of the slave trade to the United States in 1807, the immigration of people of African descent ended for the most part. African Americans, then, have not been immigrants for a long time. While a small number of people from the Caribbean arrived in the early twentieth century, their numbers were not so large as to influence the broader conceptualization of immigration (Foner 2001). However, the rapid growth of immigration from the Caribbean region after 1965 and from Africa beginning in the 1980s has reintroduced race as a salient factor in American migration studies. Waters (1994: 795) has argued that the new black immigration "challenges the dichotomy which once explained different patterns of American inclusion and assimilation – the ethnic pattern of assimilation of immigrants from Europe and their children and the racial pattern of exclusion of America's non-white peoples."<sup>7</sup>

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Karim (2007) analyses the impact of racial difference on relations between South Asian and African American Muslims in Chicago. She concludes that, “[r]ooted in a world of color lines, the American ummah [sic] claims a faith that ideally unites across race but is realistically challenged by race” (2007: 124). This unity and division are illustrated by Elliot (2007), who reports a story about how South Asian Muslims from a suburban mosque outside of New York City area and African American Muslims from the inner city neighborhood of Harlem have found common ground over the issue of racial profiling: “For decades, these two Muslim worlds remained largely separate. But last fall, Imam Talib hoped to cross that distance in a venture that has become increasingly common since Sept[ember] 11. Black Muslims have begun advising immigrants on how to mount a civil rights campaign.” Yet it must still be recalled that members of these two Muslim mosques are profiled in racially different ways for different reasons.

The responses of the Muslim Indian and Nigerian immigrants in DFW to questions about what it means to them to be American, and whether one can be *both* American and Indian or American and Nigerian, *or* whether one has to choose between national identities, raises long-standing issues regarding ethnicity and nationality. Early commentaries in the social sciences tended to treat ethnicity in the United States as a primordial identity transmitted from generation to generation – including even the descendants of immigrants who had few if any contacts with the societies of origin of their forebears. In the 1960s, social scientists began to question this notion of ethnicity, suggesting rather that members of ethnic groups were active agents in creating, adapting, and transmitting their own identities. The sociologists Glazer and Moynihan (1963), for example, called for a new conception of ethnic groups as interest groups, maintaining that in multiethnic societies, ethnicity served better than social class as a way of rallying groups of people in the competition for resources and power. A few years later, the anthropologist Barth (1969: 10) proposed that ethnic groups are “categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people.” More recently Conzen *et al.* (1998: 23) offer a more nuanced version of this view of ethnicity: “[E]thnicity is not a ‘collective fiction,’ but rather a process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories. That is, it is grounded in real life context and social experience.”

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The Indian and Nigerian Muslims interviewed in DFW attend mosque regularly and are committed Muslims. Yet when asked about how their "old" and "new" national identities related to each other – whether they could be both Indians or Nigerians and Americans – they framed their responses in terms of national identity. Their resounding reply was that a hybrid identity is not only possible; it should be embraced as part of the journey to joining American society. Given that the interviewees are immigrants, along with most other adults in both the Indian and Nigerian communities today, a "national" Indian and "national" Nigerian identity is only now developing a quarter century after the first arrivals from both countries. The divisions in India and in Nigeria between social groups of different cultural, linguistic, and religious heritages continue to play a role in their respective immigrant communities. Nonetheless, the large majority of the 100 Indian and 100 Nigerians interviewed in DFW responded immediately and similarly to the questions about national identities. The responses of the Muslim immigrants did not differ from those of their non-Muslim countrymen and women. In addition, Muslims and non-Muslims participate actively in the Indian and Nigerian national immigrant organizations: the Indian Association of North Texas, and the Nigerian National Organization. Hence it is clear that a "national" identity is under construction in each of these communities. Moreover, the increasing political engagement of both communities suggests that the common interests which have pushed immigrants from India and Nigeria to develop "national" identities are also leading them to become "ethnic" interest groups in the American context.<sup>8</sup>

The attacks on September 11, 2001 by Muslim terrorists who were born abroad and made their way to the United States have led to the inextricable intertwining of security and immigration issues. It suffices to read an American newspaper for several days to see that major feature stories, opinion columns, and shorter pieces on terrorist threats, Islam and Muslims, and immigration overlap in an endless cycle. This message ties anxiety about terrorism to concerns and speculation about Islam and the Muslim world, and then links both to immigrants and immigration. In this environment, it is not surprising that Muslims and other immigrants experience discrimination and fear.

At the same time, it is notable that they continue to identify with, and to believe that they have a place in the utopian vision that is the American dream. Citing the findings of a Pew Research Center survey of Muslims in

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Europe and the United States, the journalist MacAskill of *The Guardian* recently published an article entitled, “US Muslims more assimilated than British” (2007). Seizing on the contrast between the situation in Europe and the United States, American Muslim leaders such as Salam al-Marayti of the Muslim Public Affairs Council have underscored the importance of inclusion: “Europe’s ‘ghettos’ are a warning to America: Integrate, don’t isolate Muslim Communities” (2005: 25A).

As Muslims, the immigrants discussed in this essay are part of the American *‘umma*, and their interests echo those of other Muslims. At the same time, they belong to distinct national communities and respond in unequivocally positive terms to queries about the prospect and possibility of becoming part of American society. For these Indians and Nigerians, then, being a Muslim, while very important, is but one identity among a set of identities crossing the boundaries of religion, race, nationality, and ethnicity to which they refer in order to negotiate being an immigrant in America after September 11.

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## Note biographique

Dennis Cordell est professeur d’histoire à l’Université Southern Methodist (Dallas). Il était anciennement professeur associé de démographie à l’Université de Montréal. Il mène des recherches sur la migration en Afrique ainsi que sur l’immigration africaine en France et aux États-Unis. Avec Joel W. Gregory et Victor Piché, il a publié *Hoe and Wage: A Social History of a Circular Migration System in West Africa* (1996). Pour des renseignements sur d’autres publications, voir : <http://faculty.smu.edu/dcordell>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Entitled “Immigrants, Rights, and Incorporation in a Suburban Metropolis,” National Science Foundation, 2001-2005, Grant BCS0003938. The principal investigators from Southern Methodist University were Caroline Brettell (Department of Anthropology), James F. Hollifield (Department of Political Science), and Dennis D. Cordell (Department of History), along with a colleague then from the University of Texas at Arlington, Manuel Garcia y Griego (Department of Political Science). I wish to express my deep and sincere appreciation to Sibusisiwe Mlambo and Dena Pritchett, research assistants who worked with me in the Nigerian community. To be sure, opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this essay are mine alone and do not reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> Through many libraries in North America, articles from *The Dallas Morning News* may be accessed on-line at, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> The exact percentage would have been 3.69 percent, but to cite such a figure would suggest that the KERA estimate of the Muslim population is precise, which it probably is not. The KERA report does not define North Texas geographically. If the designation refers to the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area (or, more precisely, the Dallas/Fort Worth/Arlington Metropolitan area defined by the United States Bureau of the Census), the 2000 census counted a population of 5,221,801 people, and in 2005 the American Community Survey estimated the total to be 5,727,391. Assuming that the growth of 505,590 people in the intervening five years was spread evenly over the period at about 100,000 annually, the population in 2002 would have been 5,424,037. Taking the higher end of the KERA range of 150,000 to 200,000 Muslims in DFW, the Muslim population would have constituted roughly 4 percent of the population of the metropolitan area in 2002. See <http://gstudynet.org/gum/US.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Modjarrad & Abusaad emphasize that they are a full-service immigration law firm, announcing that “We Specialize In: Immigration Bonds, Detention & Removal, Student Visas, Work Visas, Alien Relative Petitions, Adjustment Of Status, Pardons, Removing Conditions, Appeals, Asylum, Voluntary Departures, Info Passes, DORA Interviews.”

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Charles Hirschman (2004). It is perhaps indicative of the recent nature of Muslim immigration that this article does not include Islam in either its historical or contemporary analyses.

<sup>6</sup> Only in the case of the man worried about his wife because she wore a headscarf when in public was the concern based on characteristics associated with Islam.

<sup>7</sup> This quotation is cited in Brettell (2007: 3).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of these transformations among immigrants in American history, see Portes and Rumbaut (1996).

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