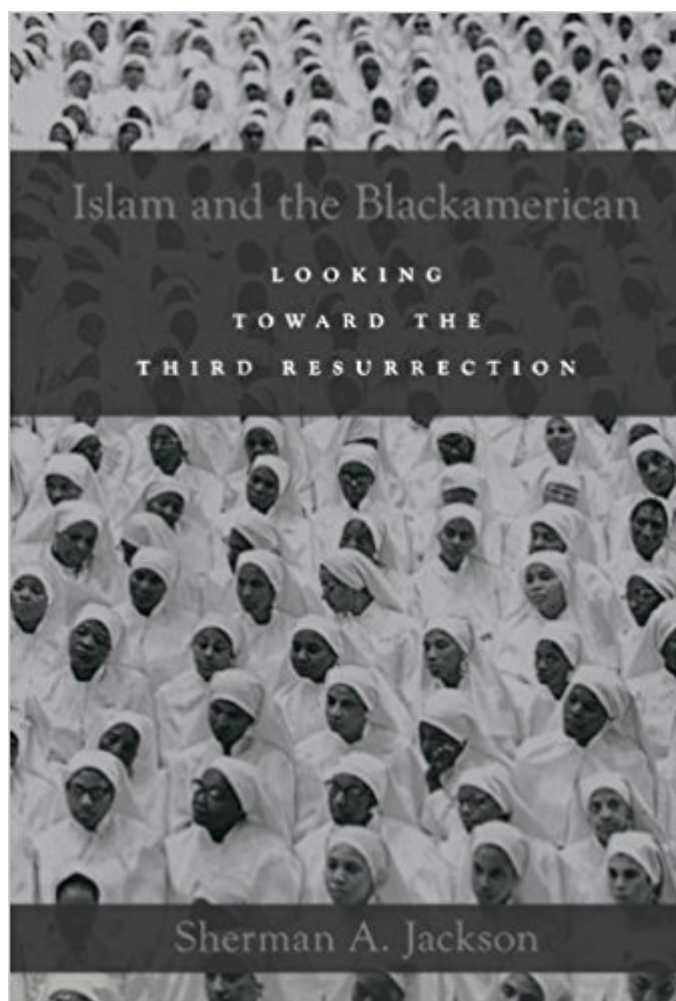


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# Islam And The Blackamerican: Looking Toward The Third Resurrection



## Synopsis

Sherman Jackson offers a trenchant examination of the career of Islam among the blacks of America. Jackson notes that no one has offered a convincing explanation of why Islam spread among Blackamericans (a coinage he explains and defends) but not among white Americans or Hispanics. The assumption has been that there is an African connection. In fact, Jackson shows, none of the distinctive features of African Islam appear in the proto-Islamic, black nationalist movements of the early 20th century. Instead, he argues, Islam owes its momentum to the distinctively American phenomenon of "Black Religion," a God-centered holy protest against anti-black racism. Islam in Black America begins as part of a communal search for tools with which to combat racism and redefine American blackness. The 1965 repeal of the National Origins Quota System led to a massive influx of foreign Muslims, who soon greatly outnumbered the blacks whom they found here practicing an indigenous form of Islam. Immigrant Muslims would come to exercise a virtual monopoly over the definition of a properly constituted Islamic life in America. For these Muslims, the nemesis was not white supremacy, but "the West." In their eyes, the West was not a racial, but a religious and civilizational threat. American blacks soon learned that opposition to the West and opposition to white supremacy were not synonymous. Indeed, says Jackson, one cannot be anti-Western without also being on some level anti-Blackamerican. Like the Black Christians of an earlier era struggling to find their voice in the context of Western Christianity, Black Muslims now began to strive to find their black, American voice in the context of the super-tradition of historical Islam. Jackson argues that Muslim tradition itself contains the resources to reconcile blackness, American-ness, and adherence to Islam. It is essential, he contends, to preserve within Islam the legitimate aspects of Black Religion, in order to avoid what Stephen Carter calls the domestication of religion, whereby religion is rendered incapable of resisting the state and the dominant culture. At the same time, Jackson says, it is essential for Blackamerican Muslims to reject an exclusive focus on the public square and the secular goal of subverting white supremacy (and Arab/immigrant supremacy) and to develop a tradition of personal piety and spirituality attuned to distinctive Blackamerican needs and idiosyncrasies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"...offers many helpful insights while giving a voice to often-ignored Blackamerican Muslims....will contribute to the lively and growing debate over the place of Islam in America and the role of Blackamerican Muslims in the contemporary American religious scene." --The Virginia Quarterly Review

"...sets forth a vision of Islam that is at once holistic and pragmatic: a source of inner strength, a builder of human character, and a bridge to salvation. This book is required reading for anyone who has ever pondered how the long span of Muslim history connects to the Blackamerican stake in an ongoing and enabling Islamic identity." --Bruce Lawrence, author of *New Faiths, Old Fears: Muslims and Other Asian Immigrants in American Religious Life*

"A must read for anyone interested in an important and challenging interpretation of Islam and African Americans." --James H. Cone, author of *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare*

"...presents a dazzling challenge to the white elitism of American society and the immigrant elitism of Western Islam. Terrific!" --Jane I. Smith, author of *Islam in America*

"...makes a highly significant contribution to the literature on Islam in America and the study of religion, history, and Black Americans. It gives us a rare and nuanced analysis of the spread of Islam amongst indigenous Americans and explores the ideological complexity and tensions of recent transformations of American Muslim society. This book should become a standard for classroom use in the courses on Islam in America and is broadly of interest in fields of religious studies, anthropology, sociology, and American history." --Contemporary Islam

Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, The University of Michigan

GREAT

Every Muslim should read this book. The analysis on the immigrant/indigenous American Muslim is

just brilliant and is just one of the wonderful aspects of this book. I could hardly put it down. May Allah give Dr. Jackson tawfiq and bring him closer to Him.

Not quite finished with it yet- a definite tilt toward the views of Elijah Muhammad- not sure that his conclusions necessarily reflect the facts he presents.

Islam and the Blackamerican is an important work for Christians, and Muslims. It clarifies the difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims and the difference between the Nation of Islam and the "orthodox" branches of Islam. It also shows the evolving nature of both the Nation of Islam and Wallace Muhammad's "break" with the Nation; while simultaneously demonstrating how the proto-Black Islamists set the tone for where Islam among Blackamericans is today. In addition, the author gives the uninitiated reader a sound and solid definition of Sufism and shows how Sufism is (in his opinion) the best path for Blackamerican muslims going forward. A most helpful analysis of Black Theology (for Christians) and its impact on Blackamerican Muslims and non-Muslims is provided by the author. Most revealing, however, is his analysis of how the late 20th Century immigration of a large number of Muslims from the "Middle East" has impacted Blackamerican Muslims.

Professor Jackson is at the height of his analytical powers in this book.

a very interesting book- extremely analytical- especially in its critique of Black Orientalism- while unlike regular Orientalism which misinterpreted the Muslim world in order to dominate it, misinterprets the Muslim world in order to protect black identity from influences which supposedly threaten the African core. He's very adept at making comparisons- and highlights some issues that are certainly the most pressing towards the Black Muslim community today; now that Black Nationalism is no longer a common rallying point for black Muslims, and now that immigrant influence has seen to be obnoxious and domineering, it is indeed time for a "third resurrection"- for blackamerican Muslims to appropriate the mainstream Muslim tradition for themselves so that they are neither dominated by Muslim foreigners nor simply using Islam as a protest ideology without an authentic religious connection. To become more in a sense like the West African Muslims who so impressed Blyden- deeply Muslim, yet dignified having appropriated it for themselves, not having been dominated by non-black foreigners. Sherman Jackson's solutions are interesting (it is after all just a book meant to start off discussion)- his consideration of Sufism interesting- I certainly hope to

see more such discussion in this direction- but of course- it will be long before the masses see the issues above as lucidly as the academics.

Dr Jackson write a remarkable summary of the condition of Islam in America, specifically as it relates to the Blackamerican (a term he justifies using early in the book) and Immigrant Muslims. For academics and laypeople, the insights he draws from his research and his own experience as a Blackamerican Muslim are eye-opening, especially as he relates the challenge of indigenizing Islam in America. He concludes the book with a chapter on Sufism, Muslim spirituality, and the Blackamerican struggle. While I disagree with some of his conclusions, he nonetheless offers Blackamerican Muslims a natural entry point into Sufism, a part of Islam that is greatly maligned in some Muslim circles. Overall, a must read for Muslim Americans, immigrant, white and black!

Dr. Sherman Jackson's book is concerned with the "third resurrection" of Islam among Blackamericans. The first resurrection refers to the period before the death of Elijah Muhammad and his proto-Islamic movement, which was essentially a "holy protest" against white supremacy and anti-black racism. In the period of the second resurrection, it was charismatic leadership rather than "any objective method for scriptural interpretation that made or unmade doctrine." The third resurrection would hopefully be characterized by the "appropriation and mastery of the Islamic tradition." Dr. Jackson defines "appropriation" as the "enlisting of a set of non-indigenous ideas or doctrines for one's existential or ideological struggle." In other words, Blackamericans will not come to a foreign Islam that looks to the world through the prism of others' historical experiences ignoring their own experiences and predicaments, nor to a domesticated Islam that appeals to the dominant groups rather than combating supremacy and striving for a just peace. In order to clear any misunderstanding, Dr. Jackson spent considerable time detailing his vision for the third resurrection. The protest spirit of Black Religion must be maintained but not to the detriment of the moral and spiritual. Put simply, what is required is a balance between protest and piety, activism and spirituality, the pursuit of secular goals and the quest for eschatological success. Black religion must rid itself of the exclusive obsession with race and the insistence on eliminating the evil of white supremacy without an attempt to contribute good to the world. Blacks, and the other Muslims, must understand that they need to recognize the US constitution and embrace America "in protest," something that Dr. Jackson authenticates and justifies using the Islamic sources and tradition, and not to destroy themselves by victimology, glorification of ignorance, and rejectionism. At the same time, the last thing needed is a theology of accommodation, dictated by certain tendencies in

Immigrant Islam especially after the catastrophe of 9/11, where Islam is domesticated and used to bolster the assumptions of the privileged groups and to beg for their recognition. Dr. Jackson deals with aspects of the relationship between Black American and Immigrant Islam focusing on the monopoly exercised by the immigrants over the interpretation of the faith and the determination of the substance and priorities of Islam in America. His analysis is elegant and deeply objective. This is clear from his refusal to make one historical experience the sole determiner of the goals and objectives of Islam in the US and his refusal of "false universals" where a version of Islam is considered to be the "true" Islam without paying any attention to the particularities of the various Muslim communities. Rejecting "false universals" does not at all mean compromising anything essential to the doctrinal integrity of Islam; it means taking the historical experiences and customs of the different Muslim groups into account while formulating a vision of Islam that helps them in this life and the afterlife. Despite his correct and convincing critique of Immigrant Islam, Dr. Jackson also deconstructs the assertions of "Black Orientalism"---a tendency by some Blacks to consider Islam the (main) enemy of Black people. The fundamental problem with Black Orientalism is that it analyzed the historical experience of Black people through the prism of American slavery. Dr. Jackson did not deny the presence of anti-Black sentiments in the Islamic tradition. Backing his arguments with historical facts, he calls for an objective assessment of these since there is a huge difference between societies which produce expressions of racial and color prejudice and societies that are founded on notions of racial superiority of some people and the utter inferiority of others who do not have the same skin color. Dr. Jackson's book is a must-read for anyone interested in the future of Islam in America. The most important thing about his prescriptions is that they can be embraced by all Muslims regardless of their background. First, they are faithful to the definitives of Islam. Second, they are balanced and take the different aspects of the Islamic faith into account. Third, they are based on the emphatically tolerant and pluralistic Islamic tradition---something that should promote intra-Muslim tolerance and, most importantly, prevent any particular group from laying exclusive claim over the divine truth.

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