How American Am I?

Comparing American Identity among U.S. Black Muslims

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Abstract

Much sociological attention has focused on Black identity within the United States. Less attention, however, has been given to understanding how immigrant and native-born streams of U.S. Black Muslims articulate American identity. In this study I ask: how do second-generation Black American Muslims and indigenous Black American Muslims compare in the ways they narrate connections among race, American identity, and Islam? Using data from thirty-one in-depth interviews with Black Muslims living in Houston, TX, I find that racial double-consciousness complicates American identity for respondents. While indigenous Black American respondents critique racist U.S. histories and structural inequities, I argue that in certain spaces Muslim identity reinforces American identity. For second-generation respondents, however, American identity is reinforced through embracing immigrant status. This study extends Du Boisian double-consciousness by making a case for "layered double-consciousness." I argue that layered double-consciousness better explains how Black Muslims perceive their racial, religious, and national identities across macro levels within the context of the United States and meso levels within the Muslim American community.

Keywords: American Identity; Black Identity; Black Immigrants; Double-consciousness; Muslims; Religion

Introduction

Muslims make up one of the fastest growing and most ethnically diverse religious communities in the United States (Pew Research Center 2017). Black Muslims have a unique position within the United States as a group occupying historically marginalized religious *and* racial identities. The first Muslims to come to the United States were enslaved Africans (Diouf 1998; Gomez 2005). Islam survived, despite the disruption of slavery, through religious movements in the early twentieth century that connected faith with struggles for racial justice (Chan-Malik 2018; Gomez 2005; Miller 2019). While many of these early Muslim communities still exist in the United States, some merged into larger Sunni Muslim communities (Gomez 2005; Jackson 2005; McCloud 1995). About two-thirds of Black American Muslims are converts, with the remainder born into Muslim families with heritage connecting them to these early American Muslim communities (Gibson and Karim, 2014; Jackson 2005; McCloud 1995; Pew Research Center 2017).

This history of what Sherman Jackson (2005) calls "Blackamerican Muslims," describes a generation of Black Muslims indigenous to the United States. Their identity history differs from immigrant Black Muslim communities who are racialized as Black in the United States but whose histories and lineage do not include U.S. chattel slavery. I refer to these communities as "indigenous Black Americans." Here, "indigenous" should not be confused with Indigenous peoples who are historically and geographically native to the Americas; rather, I use indigenous throughout this paper to distinguish between second-generation Americans who are the children of Black African immigrants and those whose ancestors were born in the United States. By invoking indigeneity, I intentionally highlight the connection indigenous Black Americans have to the United States through the history of chattel slavery that positioned them as the first "Black" people within American history.

By using indigeneity as a lens through which to understand one piece of the Black American experience, I also invoke the Du Boisian concept of double-consciousness. Double-consciousness (Du Bois 1903b), or the self-awareness of one's social position as a Black person and an American, was first used by W. E. B. Du Bois to explain the peculiar situation in which Black Americans find themselves—as being both intimately connected to the United States through ancestry and the struggles for nationhood, and at the same time, cast aside as racial others. Though Du Bois theorized about the paradox of Black American identity in the early twentieth century, racial double-consciousness remains a relevant tool for understanding U.S. racial politics today. Du Bois, however, did not consider the impact that immigrant status or non-Christian religion may also have on the articulation of American identity among Black people living in the United States.

African immigration to the United States increased after The Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965 which radically changed U.S. immigration quotas on non-European immigrants (Cadge and Ecklund, 2007). The Hart-Cellar Act not only transformed the racial and ethnic landscape of the United States but diversified the U.S. religious landscape, allowing global Muslim communities to make a home in the United States (Karim 2008; Leonard 2005; Wuthnow and Offutt, 2008; Yang and Ebaugh, 2001). Black immigrant communities had to contend with the challenges of adjusting to a new land *and* the realities of U.S. racism (Magan 2020; Waters 2008, 2014). Many Black immigrant communities relied on their immigrant background to counter the adverse effects of racism and make distinctions between themselves and indigenous Black Americans (Abdi 2020; Jackson 2005; Waters 2008, 2014). The relevance of anti-Black racism, however, challenged second-generation children (Sall 2019; Waters 1994, 2008). These challenges, along with the realities of living in a post-9/11 U.S. society, position both second-generation Black American Muslims and indigenous Black American Muslims to reassess their place in American society. These histories reveal deep connections among race, religion, and American identity; and yet there is little contemporary empirical work that examines how both streams of U.S. Black Muslims understand American identity.

Drawing from thirty-one interviews with indigenous Black American Muslims and second-generation Black American Muslims, I ask: *how do second-generation Black Americans and indigenous Black American Muslims compare in the ways they narrate the connections among race, Islam, and American identity?* In doing so, I address the social problem of how U.S. Black Muslims use the overlapping social locations of religion, race, and non/immigrant heritage to construct American identity. Second-generation Black American Muslims and indigenous Black American Muslims each present a case of American identity construction. I find that racial double-consciousness complicates American identity for U.S. Black Muslims regardless of immigrant status. I argue that while both streams of U.S. Black Muslims may be critical of American identity because of U.S. racial categories, being Muslim may reinforce American identity for indigenous Black American Muslims. While scholarship on Black identity often overlooks religion, particularly non-Christian religion, this case demonstrates that religion is a primary social location through which

American identity becomes reconstructed. For second-generation respondents, however, American identity is reinforced through immigrant status. Second-generation respondents compare their own experiences living in the United States with that of their immigrant parents to construct what it means to be American. I draw from Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectional identities and Du Bois's (1903b) double-consciousness to make a case for "layered double-consciousness." I see layered double-consciousness as describing the way Black Muslims perceive their racial, religious, and national identities within the context of the United States *and* the broader Muslim American community.

Literature Review

Black Identities in the United States

Current sociological literature emphasizes the impact nativity has on shaping socioeconomic outcomes and integration among Black communities in the United States (Emeka 2019; Hamilton 2019; Showers 2015; Waters 2008, 2014). Little attention, however, has been given to understanding how U.S. Black communities compare in their perceptions of American identity. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903b) first used the term "double-consciousness" to describe the paradoxical experience of Black people in the United States—of being born into a country that ideologically promotes freedom and equality but does not afford them the opportunity to fully experience these ideals. Du Bois (1903b) describes double-consciousness as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (p. 5). Black individuals in the United States experience this sense of "twoness" by virtue of being aware of the inconsistencies within the constitutional framing of the United States and the injustice and inequities Black lives must face (Du Bois 1903b, p. 5). The concept of double-consciousness challenges the idea of national belonging and American identity for Black people in the United States. Double-consciousness, however, is predicated on indigenous Black American identity and histories; it does not directly address nuances of nativity, religion, or gender within U.S. Black communities.

For Black immigrants from Africa, double-consciousness may not share the same meaning. Much of the immigration from Africa to the United States occurred after the 1965 Immigration Act (Adjepong 2018; Emeka 2019; Hamilton 2019; Mooney 2009; Phinney and Onwughalu, 1996). While African immigrants had to contend with colonial realities in their home countries, they were disconnected from the lineage of slavery within the United States. For some Black immigrant communities, these recent histories and immigrant origins can serve as a social and structural advantage (Sowers Johnson 2008; Waters et al., 2014; Waters 1994, 2008); there is also evidence that migration itself can advantage Black communities (Hamilton 2019). Black immigrants have the highest rates of English proficiency among U.S. immigrants; and when compared with the U.S. population, higher levels of educational attainment (Anderson and Conner, 2018; New American Economy Research Fund 2020). While African immigrant educational attainment should also be considered according to country of origin and migration histories shaping immigration (Hamilton 2019), these factors may enable children of African immigrants to sustain better socioeconomic outcomes when compared with their indigenous Black American counterparts (Waters et al., 2014).

Upon immigration to the United States, Black immigrants are swept into the Black-White racial logics that organize U.S. society largely due to phenotypical traits that are socially read as "Black." Regardless of how they want to be perceived, Black immigrants learn what it means to be Black in America through experiences of anti-Black racism. Vilna Bashi Treitler (2013) argues that it is the experiences of racism that reproduce ethnicity in the form of "ethnic projects" or conscious efforts made by immigrants to ascend the U.S. racial hierarchy. Black immigrants engage in ethnic projects through emphasizing

ethnic heritage to socially distance themselves from indigenous Black Americans as a means of upward mobility (Bashi Treitler 2013). For Black immigrants, national origin can be used as a social buffer, allowing them to make distinctions from indigenous Black Americans, and to limit perceptions of racism as an integral part of the American experience (Sowers Johnson 2008; Waters 1994, 2008). First-generation Black Americans to the United States may emphasize non-physical traits like accents, dress, or names to distinguish themselves from indigenous Black American communities (Emeka 2019; Waters 1994, 2008).

Other scholars, however, argue that Black immigrant identity does not create a buffer against racism, but rather compounds the experiences of inequality and social and structural marginalization (Griffen et al., 2016; Showers 2015). The distinctions that Black immigrants may make in separating themselves from indigenous Black Americans speak to their unique experiences and the added disadvantage of being "foreign." Unlike indigenous Black Americans, Black immigrants may be unable to leverage certain forms of social and cultural capital within the United States such as language, accents, or gender norms. Such markers of foreignness in addition to "Blackness" may be a particular social problem within professional and academic spaces, where accents and linguistic fluency can directly have an impact on outcomes, opportunities, and social perceptions (Showers 2015). Fumilayo Showers (2015) distinguishes the outcomes of this additional disadvantage as especially salient for Black African immigrants when compared with Black Caribbean immigrants because of things like language or cultural and geographic proximity to the United States. While African immigrants may lack the same cultural and geographic proximity as their Caribbean counterparts, African immigrants do not share histories of slavery in the Americas. African immigrants also come from diverse religious landscapes and backgrounds. These factors may contribute to way that African immigrants navigate Black identity in American society.

Despite these differences in understanding the way that Black immigrants relate to indigenous Black American communities, there is little debate regarding the fact that for children of Black immigrants, racial identity becomes more salient (Adjepong 2018; Benson 2006; Showers Johnson 2008; Waters 1994). Because racialization within the United States depends on a combination of physical and non-physical characteristics, Black immigrants and their children can be perceived as indigenous Black Americans (Emeka 2019; Kasinitz et al., 2002; Waters 1994, 2008; Wheeler 2020). For second-generation Black Americans non-physical characteristics, like accents, may hold less salience as accents disappear and English takes linguistic precedence (Emeka 2019; Waters 1994, 2008). Without explicit markers that point to immigrant status, second-generation Black Americans are conflated with indigenous Black Americans, and may experience and challenge U.S. racism. In the racialized context of the United States, this means that Black immigrant communities may be subjected to the same structural barriers as indigenous Black Americans native to the United States. Mary C. Waters (1994) argues that for second-generation Black Americans, the conjunction of perceived Black identity and the acknowledgement of racial discrimination allows them to construct a more racially pertinent Black American identity. According to this logic, race is what positions American identity.

However, the *meanings* that second-generation Black Americans may ascribe to Black racial identity may differ from their indigenous Black American counterparts. While there is a shared racial identity with indigenous Black Americans, immigrant heritage can have an impact on what being Black means (Adjepong 2018; Benson 2006; Emeka 2019; Sall 2019). Amon Emeka (2019), for example, finds that U.S.-born Nigerian children generally retained their ethnic origin identity with the exception of those from lower-income families and with lower educational attainment who were more likely to only identify as Black. While Emeka (2019) suggests that this form of ethnic attrition may be due to associating

Nigerian identity with high educational attainment and other socioeconomic measures of success, this also has implications for how U.S.-born Nigerian children interpret what it means to be Black.

While scholars on other immigrant communities have argued that over time children of immigrants may abandon ethnic origin identities in favor of "American" identities alone, for children of Black immigrants becoming "American" may mean becoming Black (Emeka 2019). Because of U.S. racial-logics, Black identity may have more everyday relevance for the children of Black immigrants, which connects them with indigenous Black Americans (Adjepong 2018; Emeka 2019; Sall 2019). Experiences with racism and marginalization serve as a point of connection between both groups and create a Black identity that is only realized within the context of the United States (Adjepong 2018). In other words, African immigrants and their children may "become Black" in the United States and illustrate a case of racialized assimilation as a part of their integration into American society (Emeka 2019; Sall 2019).

Religion and Black Identity

For Black American communities, religion has been particularly important in helping to organize individuals and frame sociopolitical consciousness (Daulatzai 2012; Gibson and Karim, 2014; Jackson 2005; Lincoln 1994; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). While studies on religion and American identity have outlined the way that White Christians can draw upon religion and national identity to promote White supremacist Christian Nationalism, there is evidence that Black Christians also draw upon religion to contextualize American identity in a way that directly challenges racism and other forms of structural marginalization (Perry and Whitehead, 2019, 2020; Peifer et al., 2014; Tinsley et al., 2018). Black Christians have historically challenged the United States' nominally Christian identity, arguing for a reform of policies and laws to reflect a Christian perspective that confronts oppression and emphasizes justice and equity (Perry and Whitehead, 2019). Du Bois (1899, 1903a, 1903b) wrote extensively on the role of Christianity in Black American communities, and as a fixture within the United States. Despite his critiques of the Black Church in his later scholarship, early on Du Bois viewed Christianity as a center of community life for Black Americans, helping to structure morality and ethics, politics, civic engagement, education, and culture for Black people in the United States (Du Bois 1899, 1903a; Kahn 2004). He distinguished between White Christianity and Black Christianity, viewing the former's use of religion as means to uphold racial hierarchies in U.S. society as spiritual hypocrisy (Du Bois 1903b; Kahn 2004). In his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois saw Black Christian communities as potential sites of social, political, and economic uplift for Black communities in post-Reconstruction America (Du Bois 1903b). To Du Bois (1903a, 1903b), Black Christianity was an expression of spirituality linked directly to African spiritual traditions. Early on, enslaved Black people used Christianity not only to connect with their African cultural forms, but also as a means to promote Black sociopolitical aims and desires (Du Bois 1903a; Morris 2015). This view of Black American spirituality and religion points to the way that faith, for the indigenous Black American, has always been tied to the social conditions of the Black people in the United States. Similarly, Black Muslim communities have drawn on their faith to frame understandings of American identity. Indigenous Black American Muslim communities in the early twentieth century used Islam to directly confront the American conception of race, and to connect them with histories and communities beyond the United States (Chan-Malik 2018; Daulatzai 2012; Miller 2019).

For Muslim communities, ethnic diversity, geopolitics, and transnational linkages help serve to racialize Muslim identity in the United States (Chan-Malik 2018; Daulatzai 2012;

Haddad et al., 2003; Selod and Embrick, 2013; Woods and Arthur, 2014). Religion has historically been used as a racial marker, and in the post-9/11 U.S. society, religion has become an even more salient classification and identity (Daulatzai 2012; Said 1978). Saher Selod and David G. Embrick (2013) argue that the presence of perceived Muslim identity further racializes immigrant communities as not only "foreign" but specifically Muslim. Although visible Muslim markers create challenges, being negatively treated as Muslim can occur regardless of visible religious markers (Beydoun 2018; Said 1978; Selod and Embrick, 2013; Selod 2019). Embodied traits and other markers, such as language and names, become sites of perceived Muslim identity (Beydoun 2018; Said 1978; Selod and Embrick, 2013; Selod 2019). Some scholars identify this discrimination as the racialization of religion, rather than religious discrimination only (Beydoun 2018; Considine 2017; Gotanda 2011; Selod and Embrick, 2013).

Theorizing Muslim identity as a form of racialization, however, may overlook the salience race already has for Black Muslim communities in the United States as well as the distinctive salience of religion (Asad 1993; Gallonier 2015; Guhin 2018; Scheitle and Ecklund, 2020). Because of the historical effects of U.S. racism and the racial categorization of immigrants (Treitler 2013), Black Muslims can often experience isolation and discrimination within the United States *and* within the largely multiethnic Muslim American community (Chan-Malik 2018; Karim 2005; Kashani 2023; Prickett 2018). Both indigenous Black American Muslims and Black immigrant Muslims experience an intersection between racialized and marginalized religious identities. Although many immigrant Black Muslim communities are genealogically connected to Islam through family lineage, their Muslim heritage often does not preclude them from the influence of racial hierarchies within the broader U.S. society and the reproduction of these hierarchies within the Muslim American community (Husain 2019; Karim 2008; Yazdiha 2021). Indigenous Black American Muslims face similar challenges, in addition to dealing with biases within the Muslim American community for not having generational Muslim heritage (Husain 2019; Karim 2005, 2008). By generational Muslim heritage, I refer to the reality that most immigrant Muslim communities are born into generations of Muslim family members. Despite their diverse backgrounds, Black Muslims, immigrant and non-immigrant alike, are challenged with the effects of race and religion and their relationship to American identity.

Although race is often considered a primary identity that structures social, economic, and political outcomes within the United States, within post-9/11 U.S. society, Muslim identity also structurally impacts aspects of life such as policing, surveillance, and professional opportunities (Abdul Khabeer 2016; Beydoun 2018; Kashani 2023; Peek 2004; Santoro and Azab, 2015; Scheitle and Ecklund, 2020; Selod and Embrick, 2013). It is important to understand the relationship between religion and race, and the effects it may have on U.S. Black Muslims. Existing scholarship looks at how Black identity and Muslim identity individually impact American identity. Limited scholarship empirically examines how the juxtaposition of Black Muslim identity impacts American identity across immigrant status. This study provides a much-needed analysis of the connection between race and religion and its impact on national identity. Much sociological literature on U.S. Muslims and American identity has focused on Muslims of South Asian or Arab descent. While there is increasing literature on Black Muslims in the United States, there is no sociological study of how the lived experiences of both immigrant and indigenous streams of U.S. Black Muslims compare in the ways they articulate American identity.

Methods

I conducted a qualitative study using thirty-one in-depth interviews with self-identified Black Muslims living within Houston, TX. Houston is the fourth largest city in the United

States and has a relatively large Muslim community (Kinder Institute for Urban Research 2020). It also has a growing and ethnically diverse Black population, with one of the highest populations of Nigerian Americans in the country (New American Economy Research Fund 2020). Although Black Muslims make up a significant proportion of Muslims in Houston, they are still a relatively small community. Qualitative interviews were used to best present the perspectives of this group and to interrogate how U.S. Black Muslims articulate their connection to American identity.

Prior to conducting interviews, I visited different Houston-area Muslim communities for ten months during 2018–2019. I visited eight different masajid[1] (mosques), and attended congregational Friday prayers, religious conventions, Ramadan iftars (dinners), women's circles, and other events. Though respondents sometimes talked about a specific masjid that they felt closest to or attended most frequently, it was not uncommon for respondents to attend a variety of masajid around the city of Houston. Sometimes respondents more frequently attended masajid that they did not feel particularly close to because of the proximity of the masjid to their job or home. More often, respondents were able to draw on a variety of experiences in multiple masjid spaces because of the overlap of activities between masajid in Houston. For example, in Houston there is a regular speaker series that brings Muslim public figures and religious leaders to different masajid across the city. Since there is not one masjid that facilitates the events, attendees get to regularly attend multiple masajid across Houston. Because of this, it is through engaging in community activities that I was able to meet potential respondents and get a better sense of the spatial, ethno-racial, and cultural dynamics of Muslim communities in Houston. There are several majority Black masajid in Houston including several Imam WD Mohammed affiliated masajid, majority West African masajid, and other convert-led communities. However, Muslim community dynamics in Houston are heavily influenced by the large proportion of South Asian Muslims that live in the city (Gray 2018; Kinder Institute for Urban Research 2020; Pew Research Center 2017). Therefore, many, if not most, masajid in Houston have South Asian majorities, which many of respondents frequented. I observed this dynamic when attending Houston-area masajid. While it was not common to see South Asian Muslims attending the majority-Black or West African masajid, it was much more common to see Black Muslims and Muslims of other ethnicities in majority-South Asian masajid. I began my interviews during the fall of 2019 and ended interviewing in the summer of 2020. I relied on target sampling and respondent-driven sampling to expand my pool of interviewees (Becker 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 2007; Ecklund 2006; Heckathorn 1997; Weiss 1994). Respondents were asked to provide the contact information of potential respondents to continue to expand my pool of interviews and I utilized several different snowball chains from the different masajid. Of the thirty-one interviews, sixteen of my respondents identified as Black/African American and fifteen identified as the U.S.-born children of African immigrants. I interviewed a total of seventeen women and fourteen men. Of the sixteen Black/African American respondents, ten converted to Islam and six were born into Muslim families. None of the second-generation respondents converted to Islam. Of second-generation respondents, seven were of Nigerian descent, two were of Ugandan descent, one was of Somali descent, one was of Eritrean descent, and four were of Sudanese descent. Second-generation respondents were, on average, younger than the Black/African American respondents. This is likely due to immigration waves from African countries to the United States that increased in the 1980s and after. Indigenous Black American Muslims were on average older than second-generation respondents because of the large proportion of converts represented in this group. Converts were typically older than those indigenous Black Americans who were born into Muslim families.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, I adapted my initial in-person interviews to be conducted virtually via WhatsApp video-meeting or over the phone. I conducted twelve in-person interviews and nineteen interviews over the phone or through WhatsApp. Interviews lasted between one to three hours. Interview questions ranged from topics regarding personal faith identity, religious upbringing, community affiliation, race, American identity, and transnational identity. Respondents were also asked to complete a short demographic survey at the end, which allowed for a better comparison of age, education, and gender.

I used a semi-inductive approach to data analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2007; Ecklund 2006; Weiss 1994). To understand the way indigenous and second-generation Black Muslims interpret American identity, I looked for patterns within the interview data that reflect each case. I transcribed the interviews and highlighted sections for key quotes that could be useful for further analysis of potential themes. I then organized the descriptive coding through a spreadsheet based directly on respondents' quotes in response to the interview questions. Next, I made note of how each response helped answer a piece of the research question to compare respondents more closely with each other. I made note of patterns unique to each case, or patterns that overlapped between indigenous and second-generation respondents. Finally, I wrote short memos about emerging themes and began to formulate a more interpretive view of how respondents' identities related to each other.

Being a Black Muslim woman aided my ability to enter the local community and eventually connect with my respondents. As a woman, however, it was initially challenging to connect with men. Although the predominantly Black masajid I frequented were not completely gender segregated, events are often spatially sequestered by gender. Three of the men I initially interviewed were the husbands of women respondents, and one of the men was the brother of one of the women interviewees. Black immigrant masajid were initially less open to speaking with me, as someone not already embedded within the community. As such, I relied primarily on respondent-driven sampling and key informants to recruit second-generation respondents. Phone interviews also allowed for more anonymity regarding my own background. While respondents were often aware that I am a Black Muslim, they were not always aware of my immigrant status as a self-identified indigenous Black American Muslim.

Results

Du Boisian Double-consciousness

Of my thirty-one respondents, most described feeling a sense of tension between being Black and being American. Although most do not specifically reference Du Bois or use the term "double-consciousness," I interpret their descriptions as Du Boisian double-consciousness. For indigenous Black American respondents double-consciousness was directly linked to histories of slavery and segregation, structural constraints, and systemic racism; while second-generation respondents described double-consciousness as the longevity of systemic racism as evidenced by contemporary public displays of racist violence. One indigenous Black American woman reflected:

> …it is important to see how society sees oneself…I tried to move through the world as just a person, and it was the people on the outside who wanted to remind me "oh no, you're Black"…so I think about my children, to have them be mindful that they can call themselves Black American, they can call themselves African American, they can call themselves just American, they can say "I'm a human being"- OK. And you understand this world unfortunately will see you in a certain way. That stuff isn't made

up. Why is it that I have to show my son *When They See Us*? Why is it that my parents thought that there was value in me seeing the place that Martin Luther King was killed? So, I think it's all related to that… (BAM02).

For this respondent, the tension between Black identity and American identity is described as generational. She describes learning from her parents the importance of understanding how the world sees her. Although she describes her attempts to move through the world without the weight of race, she was quickly reminded that she cannot. She interprets this as a structural constraint because of the external perception of her as a Black person.

 Second-generation respondents also expressed a racial double-consciousness. They drew on their experiences and observations of American society to demonstrate their own tensions between a belief in colorblind American identity and the realities of American racism. As one respondent reflected:

The narrative that's been painted to America as a whole, to be American is to be revolutionary and to stand up for democracy and justice and rights for all. That's what they to tell us that being American is. I personally growing up, how can you say no to that? It's so idealistic…But then at the same time, you start to realize that to be American it's just to be in your place. Everybody has a place, whether or not they realize it…To be American is to know your place and to sit there, and that's what I feel is being rioted against nowadays because the more and more people stick with that interpretation, the more and more people will realize that there's a small percentage of the country that takes advantage of the rest (BIM13; Male).

 Racial double-consciousness or perceiving one's racial self through the lens of U.S. society, was unsurprisingly a recurring theme among all respondents. At the level of the state, Black respondents articulated a self-awareness of both their privilege as U.S. citizens and the multiple ways that the state worked to keep Black people from full access to these privileges. Regardless of ethnic origins, Black respondents are conscious of how race positions them within American society. In this way, my respondents express a Du Boisian double-consciousness of their identities as Americans. However, the extent to which respondents express their own affinity to being American differs according to immigrant status. Indigenous Black American respondents were much more consistent in their criticism of American identity and the United States because of their generational relationship to the country. As one respondent reflected:

…I know that it has changed, for me, through my life. I mean, of course, while the police brutality and things like that - I mean, we grew up with that and we grew up being at the very least cautious of America or before - or our relationship with America or the American government…And so, I looked at America through that person. Now, I've reconciled with that. I've gone from thinking that that was my narrative as far as being stolen [from] my country, to the narrative that story is quintessentially American. If we as African Americans are not American, then who is? Because surely, isn't White folk… So, I've gone from thinking that, "Maybe I should go back to the motherland" and all this other stuff, to "No, man, they're not pushing me out." This is my place. This is my land. I built this (BAM15; Male).

 While this respondent shares that he feels strongly American through the reconciliation of his historical narrative, he is not uncritical of the impact it has for him personally or for Black communities. His affinity for American identity is *because of* his experiences with

U.S. racism and the legacies of slavery, not in spite of them. His identification as an American has evolved because of his acknowledgement that the legacy and struggles of Black people in the United States are authentically American. From his perspective, indigenous Black Americans must reappropriate what it means to truly be American. Legacies of slavery, trauma, racism, forced labor, and injustice compel indigenous Black American respondents to have a more critical view of American identity, even when they choose to accept it.

While second-generation respondents also described feeling a sense of racial double-consciousness, they also viewed American identity through the lens of their status as second-generation Americans. Second-generation respondents were aware of the way that Black identity shaped their experiences with U.S. racism, particularly given the political moment of Black Lives Matter that was a political backdrop during the time of the interviews. Nevertheless, they were less critical in their assertions of American identity. Second-generation affinity for American identity was expressed through their family narratives of immigration. One respondent shared:

> So, when I think of American identity, I think of certain ideals like freedom of expression, freedom of choice… Everyone thinks America is - yeah, at first there's issues, capitalism…But aside from all of that, I feel as though having been born and raised here the privilege of this freedom and also like being granted education is like, - I could not be who I was without it… I feel proud to have that blue passport (BIM04; Female).

While this respondent acknowledges existing inequities within the United States, she highlights what she believes to be the opportunity for individual achievement that is ingrained within American society. She feels that despite the challenges of being a Black Muslim in U.S. society, her options are still better relative to challenges that she could face outside of the United States. While this comparison was not shared by all second-generation respondents, second-generation respondents embraced American identity less critically than their indigenous Black American counterparts.

Layered Double-consciousness

Despite distinctive perceptions of American identity, respondents point to the ways that racial double-consciousness can contribute to an understanding of what it means to be Muslim in the United States. Although Muslim identity is not described by respondents as having the same relationship with the United States as Black identity, respondents describe racial double-consciousness as a way of also interpreting their position as Muslims. My respondents shared that their experiences being Muslim in the United States often differed *because* they are Black. Here, a respondent described an instance at work where his Muslim identity was overlooked because of his race:

> …I've had people at my job who knows that I'm Muslim. I remember them having a conversation about, I think Bin Laden might have still been alive then. But they were talking all of this stuff about Islam…And I'm just standing there like, "Dude, what they don't see" - you know what I'm saying? …So, the brain's not processing it, wait a minute…This is the guy who works during Ramadan. Over Ramadan is like, "Has Ramadan started?" they're asking me. But then, when they have this conversation, it doesn't enter their mind like, "Hey, we could be insulting this guy." Because I'm a

Black man. I mean this is a guess. I would assume that they equate a Black man being Muslim the same way we might view a White person practicing Buddhism (BAM06).

This respondent illustrates the way that Black Muslims can be perceived as not truly Muslim within the American public. Here, the respondent expresses a type of double-consciousness in the way that he understands how he is perceived as a Muslim in the broader American society. Despite knowing that the respondent identified as a Muslim, here his coworkers are oblivious to their association of Islam with terrorism. This is largely due to the American perception of Muslims as being juxtaposed outside of the U.S. context. Within the American public, authentic Muslim identity is only associated with "foreignness." As an indigenous Black American man, he is not regarded as someone who could be fully considered Muslim.

Black identity also impacted how respondents experienced being Muslim within the context of U.S. Muslim communities. Experiences with racial double-consciousness in American society also allowed respondents to interpret and narrate their experiences as Black people within the multiethnic Muslim American community. I describe this self-awareness as a form of "layered double-consciousness." Black Muslims describe a self-awareness of the consequences of Blackness at both the macro level of nation-state and the meso level of religious community. While Muslims often look to their faith as a solution to racism, indigenous and second-generation respondents shared examples of how immigrant identity, specifically Arab and South Asian identity, is privileged within Muslim American spaces. Black Muslims make distinctions between the anti-racist potential of Islam and the often-racist actions of Muslims. As one respondent put it, "There is absolutely no racism in Islam. Not in Islam, but among Muslims" (BAM11, Male). Masajid and other community spaces may reinforce Arab and South Asian identity through language, food, and dress. This may in turn isolate Black Muslims and contribute to anti-Black racism in Muslim spaces. One second-generation male respondent described feeling uncomfortable talking about his Black identity in Muslim spaces out of fear of being ostracized:

I've become more cognizant of certain biases in the Muslim community, I wouldn't say I really downplayed being Black. I just never talked about it…people look at things that Black Muslims do or just Black people in general that have that hatred towards, or that enmity like, What are you doing? Why are you trying to be 'ghetto' or something like that (BIM13).

Both second-generation Black American Muslims and indigenous Black American Muslims shared how within majority Arab and South Asian masajid and community spaces they felt pressured to minimize their Black identity. As one indigenous Black American woman shared:

I think I was kinda forced to a little bit cuz that's what everybody in the community was doing…So, there's still kind of like, if you're not wearing an abaya or you're not wearing shalwar kameez, or if your hijab is not a certain way then you're less Muslim. So, they still have those ideals and opinions and outlooks. And they kinda still try and make me responsive and more active in a way because of the way that they feel. But after a certain point I'd say no, I didn't feel like I needed to downplay me being Black to appear more Muslim. But that's because of my conviction not because of what – cuz at this point in time, I think people do try to make Black people downplay their Black identity to appear or seem more Muslim (BAM16).

Across the Houston Muslim community, Arab and South Asian culture is viewed as compatible with Islam, while Black culture is often interrogated. My respondents describe the way Blackness is treated in the Muslim American community as something that is novel or backwards. Many describe an awareness that their Muslim identity is often questioned or minimized in non-Black Muslim spaces because of how they are perceived as Black people. For second-generation Black American respondents, the assumption that Black identity is less Muslim could be especially challenging given their heritage connection to Islam. As one second-generation respondent reflected:

> I feel like in the Muslim community, a lot of people, I'm guessing more Arabs, and people are like a Desi ethnicity. When they see Black people, they just think hundred percent everyone's a convert, even African Americans. I have African American friends who their grandparents were the ones who became Muslim, not even their parents. It's like, they're seen as like, 'oh, you're like, a convert, I need to teach you how to do this. I need to teach how to' like, no, I'm good…You don't need to teach me anything. Thank you very much. And they try to correct any little thing you do…So that is kind of like annoying, because they just assume you don't know anything…And then when I tell people no, like, I studied and I speak Arabic, and I memorized the Quran. Like I've done all these things, they're all like "What? You did that? You did that? you did that?" Like yeah, it's not only for you, it's my religion too (BIM2, Female).

The respondent shares the paternalistic nature that Muslims of Arab and South Asian descent often have towards Black Muslims in the United States. While Black American Muslims have multiple histories that connect them to Islam, this diversity is often ignored and overlooked by the broader Muslim American community who may see Black Muslims in the U.S. as a monolith. This oversight not only erases the complexity of Islam among U.S. Black Muslims, but it also serves to consistently treat Black Muslims as religious newcomers. Black Muslims are often initially perceived as perpetual converts, regardless of their lineage or family ties to Islam. While the respondent shares her frustration given her Nigerian heritage that ties her to generations of Islam within her family, she also shares that Arab and South Asian minimization of Black Muslim identity also overlooks the generations of Muslim heritage that exist among many indigenous Black American Muslims.

Layered Double-consciousness and Immigrant Status in the Muslim American Community

Both indigenous and second-generation respondents report feeling pressured to downplay their Blackness in favor of a colorblind Muslim identity. However, ignorance about Black people's connection to Islam impacted my respondents differently according to their immigrant status. Second-generation respondents acknowledged the way Muslim lineage outside the United States is generally privileged within Muslim spaces. As one second-generation respondent elaborated:

> I come from the experience of having lived overseas where in Muslim majority countries where other people accepted that as a Black person, I could also be Muslim because they understood what it is to be Sudanese. Even though there was racism there I don't think there was ever a question of us being less Muslim…In the United States, it's been a different experience where I think people do have that perception, and

primarily immigrants have that perception of we are more Muslim than Black people…the problem comes from other people who don't understand who have maybe some problematic views of what it means to be Muslim and how Muslim you are based on your family history (BIM15; Female).

This respondent makes a distinction between the way that Black identity is perceived in the United States and within Muslim-majority countries. While Muslim-majority countries are not immune to anti-Black racism, Blackness is not always considered to be outside of the realm of Muslim identity. However, in the United States, Black identity is scrutinized within the Muslim American community because of the misconception that Black people lack Muslim lineage. Within Muslim spaces in the United States, this assumption further marginalizes indigenous Black American Muslims. While Black immigrants and their children may be able to claim extensive Muslim lineage in countries such as Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, or Senegal, indigenous Black American Muslims may be the only Muslim in their families or have more recent Muslim lineage.

Because second-generation respondents have parents who immigrated from countries with majority Muslim or significant Muslim populations, they were able to connect their ethnic heritage to their Muslim identities. While anti-Blackness impacts Black Muslims regardless of immigrant status, immigrant heritage can serve as a marginal advantage within the Muslim American community. As one second-generation respondent shared:

And I also feel like African Americans are treated in the Muslim community…they're a bit less favorable than Africans, in my opinion, from what I've seen. Especially like, even by Africans sometimes they're also treated badly (BIM2, Female).

While having Muslim heritage from African countries did not shield Black Muslims from experiences of anti-Black racism, it did give second-generation respondents lineage and culture that helped to authenticate and establish their Muslim identity within the broader Muslim American community. Second-generation respondents described how non-Black Muslim spaces were unwelcoming of their Black African selves, while at the same time having second-generation American status gave them a concrete way to link their Muslim selves to longer histories of Islam.

For some second-generation Black Muslims, aspects of their ethnic identity could also afford them certain privileges in non-Black Muslim spaces. Knowledge of Arabic language or Qur'an could sometimes serve as a point of advantage. One respondent whose parents immigrated from Sudan shared:

I never felt welcome to or encouraged or anything to center, the African parts of my identity I— no that was discouraged. Yeah, it was just all of the ways in which the language afforded me similarity and afforded me community with this community of advantage (BIM11, Female).

This respondent illustrates how Black African heritage can be both situated inside and outside of the Muslim American community. Here, the respondent's Sudanese heritage is valued primarily because of the connections to Arabic. The respondent's linguistic heritage affords her a certain level of advantage within her majority Arab masjid. Though her knowledge of Arabic and her Muslim heritage allow her to connect with other non-Black Muslims in her community, she describes a sort of Du Bosian "twoness" in the way she feels compelled to isolate her Muslim self from her Blackness.

Layered Double-consciousness and Black American Indigeneity

While Black Muslims find spiritual fulfillment in Islam, they experience a sort of double-consciousness within the U.S. Muslim spaces at the same time they are already experiencing racial double-consciousness as Black people in American society. For indigenous Black American Muslims, this layered double-consciousness experienced within community can feel particularly isolating because it discredits their unique pathways to Islam. Because of the assumption that Black Muslims are perpetual newcomers in Islam, indigenous Black American Muslims, whether converts or descendants of converts, often report feeling as though they will never be fully accepted as Muslims within non-Black Muslim communities. Cultural and religious practices that tie back to indigenous Black American Muslims' uniquely Black *American* Muslim identity are often dismissed within non-Black Muslim spaces. One woman described an incident that happened at the masjid in which she was racially stereotyped:

> So, on Friday nights at [the masjid] sometimes I bake baked goods and stuff like that. I try to include things that are part of my racial and cultural identity, like sweet potato pie or bean pie. And there's a young girl, she's probably eighteen or nineteen, and she had seen me there a couple Fridays. And she was like "Oh, you are like Aunt Jemima!" I was so shocked …Her dad was standing next to her, and I looked at her dad. Her dad didn't say anything. One of my friends was next to me and for two or three weeks, I didn't go in and sell there anymore. I was so hurt and upset. And she didn't understand that. She was like, "Are you serious? You're still angry about that? You're still mad or in your feelings about that?" I was like, "Yes, I am. Do you expect me to just brush that off and have that just roll up? I can't do that."…She didn't understand. She's not Black, and she just didn't understand. And I feel that goes along with that. We are just expected to just forget things (BAM14).

This respondent speaks directly to the intersectional experience of being a Black American woman in a Muslim space. It is important to note that the respondent's mention of baking bean pies directly connects to her identity as an indigenous Black American *Muslim*. Bean pie is a dessert that was created by indigenous Black Muslims in the United States and has historical and cultural ties to the history of Islam in America. The respondent is not only shocked by what the South Asian teenager said to her, but she is hurt by the fact that the girl's father did not explain to his daughter or acknowledge the inappropriateness of the comment. Later in the interview the respondent adds that the girl attends Islamic school, where the respondent thinks that racism is not thoroughly discussed as part of the curriculum. Islamic schools in which Black students and faculty are a minority can often be sites of racism (Gonzalez-Dogan 2021). Additionally, indigenous Black American expressions of Islam and Muslim identity can sometimes be minimized or dismissed as "unIslamic" (Abdul Khabeer 2016). Anti-Black racism therefore intersects with religion and immigrant status to challenge Black Muslim identity and contributes to the disconnect that many indigenous Black Muslims feel in the broader U.S. Muslim community. The fact that the respondent's friend witnessed what happened and dismissed it, illustrates how many non-Black Muslims overlook issues of anti-Blackness within Muslim community spaces.

Indigenous Black American Muslims also were aware of how they were overlooked and more structurally disadvantaged within the broader Muslim American community. Respondents described how many immigrant and immigrant-descended Muslims intentionally separated themselves from building religious community with indigenous Black American Muslims. As one respondent put it:

> And I think Toni Morrison says, it was something like, "the first thing people learn to do is be racist" or something like that among immigrants. And I don't mean that in like a interpersonally like, "oh, I'm gonna call you bad words" but in terms of being desensitized and being sort of almost programmed to think like, "oh, stay away from those people. Those people are like violent." Those people are this and that (BAM1).

While indigenous Black American Muslims recognized the ways in which all U.S. Black Muslims experienced anti-Black racism within the Muslim American community, they also were aware of how Muslim ethnic heritage advantaged Black immigrant and immigrant-descended Muslims because of its connection to Islam outside of the United States. As one respondent shared:

> …they still have a culture. They still have a trace. You know? And so we're just scrambling to identify with something, anything…(BAM11, Male).

If Muslim ethnic heritage contributed to how second-generation Black American respondents saw themselves as Muslims, Black *American* heritage contributed to how indigenous Black Americans saw themselves situated within the broader Muslim American community. The same respondent continued:

> …they had that economic base. And so, they have something that we don't…And the thing is, when you look back at the life of the Prophet, when they had to leave Mecca and they were welcome in Medina, every family took on one of the Meccans as a brother and split their, whatever they had, you know? That's something that escaped the Muslims when they came to this country. They didn't look at it – they don't look at us and say, "Okay, you know what? We see their situation. Let's see what we can do for one another…" but they came in and said, "Okay, let me build this. We just wanna be to ourselves. We only will be inclusive when it benefits us (BAM11, Male).

The respondent references the Islamic story of the *ansar* and *muhajiroon* when speaking about the economic disparities faced by indigenous Black American Muslim communities. The *muhajiroon*, or immigrants, emigrated from Mecca to Medina along with the Prophet Muhammed to escape religious persecution. The Prophet tasked the Muslims of Medina, the *ansar* or helpers, with helping the newcomers get established in their new society. Ironically, the respondent uses this religious story to situate the relationship between indigenous Black American Muslims and those Muslims with more recent histories in the United States. The legacies of American racism have systematically stagnated the socio-economic development of indigenous Black American communities. While immigrant Muslim communities in the United States have had to contend with the realities of American racism and xenophobia, they have also benefitted from hyper-selective U.S. immigration policies and civil rights law pushed forward by indigenous Black Americans (Charles et al., 2022; Hamilton 2015; Kashani 2023; Lee and Zhou, 2015). The respondent's description of the extent to which immigrant and immigrant-descended Muslim communities intentionally disassociate themselves from indigenous Black American Muslims reinforces an awareness of his identity not only as a Muslim, but as a Black American Muslim, in the United States and in the broader Muslim American community.

These examples point to how Black Muslims can experience racial double-consciousness at different levels of society. Black Muslims report racialized tensions within their religious communities, just as they do in the broader U.S. society. Both second-generation and indigenous respondents describe how within non-Black Muslim spaces

they have learned to see their Muslim identity through the lens of race. Just as respondents notice inconsistencies in the values promoted by the United States and the realities of racism, they also recognize the limitations of Muslims when compared with the ideals of racial equity promoted in Islam. Nearly all respondents distinguish the unifying potential of Islam from the racist actions of U.S. Muslims. This demonstrates the way that layered double-consciousness necessitates a macro-level self-awareness not only of what it means to be Black and Muslim in America, but also a meso-level self-awareness of what it means to be Black and Muslim in the Muslim American community.

Discussion and Conclusion

My sample of U.S. Black Muslims engage race, religion, and immigrant status to articulate their place within the United States. While racial double-consciousness is shared among all respondents, second-generation status can contribute to more positive descriptions of what it means to be American. Respondents acknowledge challenges associated with being Muslim in the United States. They articulate, however, that being Muslim is different because they are Black. Black Muslim identity contributes to a layered double-consciousness experienced at multiple levels of society. Layered double-consciousness goes beyond racial double-consciousness to incorporate the very real and distinctive religious marginalization experienced by respondents within the context of U.S. society, *and* the racial self-awareness that respondents have within non-Black Muslim American spaces. Respondents argue that Arab and South Asian identity is privileged within many U.S. Muslim spaces, which can serve to marginalize Black identity within Muslim American communities. Although this happens for all respondents regardless of immigrant status, it is particularly salient for indigenous Black American Muslims. This is because within Muslim communities, as well as in the broader United States, Islam is associated with heritage rooted *outside* the United States. Indigenous Black American Muslim respondents frequently mentioned feeling culturally isolated in some Muslim spaces because of language, (assumed) conversion status, dress, and cultural norms. Ironically, for many indigenous Black American respondents, many of these immigrant Muslim spaces helped reinforce their own American identity. Because indigenous Black American respondents do not have Muslim family lineage outside the United States, being American can serve to narrate the historical and cultural context of their faith identities.

While indigenous Black American Muslims broadly critique American identity because of anti-Black racist U.S. histories and structural inequities, their experience within the Muslim American community pushes them to reexamine their proximity to American identity. Indigenous Black American respondents question American identity because of racial double-consciousness. Despite experiences with religious discrimination, being Muslim can help reinforce American identity for indigenous Black American respondents. This is largely because indigenous Black American Muslims are positioned within a multicultural religious community comprised of multiple generations of immigrants. Within Muslim American spaces, things like language, dress, food, gender roles, and social norms get highlighted in a myriad of ways that reflect immigrant heritage. While U.S.-born second-generation Black American Muslims may also experience this, as children of immigrants they are able retain proximity to their parents' national origin identities. This fissure has an impact on the way indigenous Black American Muslims regard their identity as Americans.

Second-generation respondents also engage racial double-consciousness to examine American identity and their relationship with anti-Black racism. They use immigrant status, however, to embrace aspects of American identity while simultaneously establishing their Muslim identity within the Muslim American community. Second-generation

respondents' affinity to American identity is relative to the perceived advantage U.S. citizenship provides them when broadly compared to the realities of living outside of the United States. Second-generation respondents compare their own experiences living in the United States with opportunities and challenges their parents gained and faced as immigrants. While they acknowledge the collective challenges that Black and Muslim communities face in the United States, most did not believe that the challenges compared negatively to the sociopolitical challenges of living outside of the United States. Second-generation respondents believed that their parents' choice to immigrate to the United States resulted in their own privilege of being American.

This study provides more precision about how race and religion overlap and aid our understanding of the conditions under which both work together to shape American identity, regardless of immigrant status. Using the Du Boisian framework of double-consciousness, I find that the intersection of being a racial and religious minority shapes the way that Black Muslims experience being American and being Muslim. Layered double-consciousness weaves the macro level awareness of what it means to be Black and Muslim in the United States, together with the meso level awareness of what it means to be Black and Muslim in the U.S. Muslim community. This paper makes an important empirical contribution to the study of U.S. Muslims. While Islam may serve as a form of racialization for Muslims of Arab and South Asian descent, Blackness complicates all other intersecting identities for Black Muslims in the United States. Additionally, this framework can be used to better understand how other intersecting social locations can potentially shift across levels of analysis.

While this study examines both streams of U.S. Black Muslims, future research should more closely examine each groups' individual interpretations of American identity. An in-depth analysis of second-generation Black American Muslims could be useful in determining some potential differences in the connections between respondents' race, religion, and American identity based on distinct ethnic origins. Additionally, an in-depth study of indigenous Black American Muslims would provide a closer analysis of the impact of heritage Muslim identity. Similarly, future research should be done to examine the experiences of Black Muslims who converted to Islam. While not all indigenous Black American respondents in this study converted, a majority did. Conversion may shape the way that these respondents articulate the connections between religion and national identity. A study of Muslim converts may also highlight the ways that other convert communities, such as White American or Hispanic Muslims, may experience similar challenges with regards to the cultural disconnect within majority Arab or South Asian Muslim spaces. Finally, more research should be done to examine the effects of gender and social class.

Overall, this study is a crucial contribution to the field of sociology broadly and lays the groundwork for addressing the broader social problem of how groups integrate into a U.S. society with a historic anti-Black and anti-Muslim structure. It is a steppingstone in our understanding not only of U.S. Black Muslims, and Muslim Americans broadly, but also in our understanding of the connections among race, religion, and national identity.

Acknowledgments

Note

[1] Throughout this paper I use the Arabic term *masjid* to refer to mosque, as is used more commonly among Muslims. Here, I use *masajid* which is the plural form of *masjid*. *Masjid* and *masajid* refer to mosque and mosques respectively.

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