Introduction

In the summer of 2010, a major controversy erupted in the United States centred at Ground Zero of lower Manhattan. Media reports uncovered the story that Muslims from New York were intent on building an Islamic Center two blocks from the site of the former World Trade Center. The Park 51 project was the brainchild of Feisal Abdul Rauf, an American Muslim of Pakistani descent. Rauf’s 2004 book, *What’s right with Islam is what’s right with America*, argues that the general ethos of the United States provides an ideal context for Muslims to live out their faith. Furthermore, he asserts that American Republican democracy shares many of the ideals of classical Islamic thought. Rauf also formed the *Cordoba initiative*, a dialogue centre to engage in interfaith and intercultural dialogue. However, the Park 51 project was quickly dubbed the ‘Ground Zero mosque’ and touched a national nerve that still harbours pain from the tragedy of 9/11. In the public furore that followed, the Islamic community centre was portrayed as a radical Islamist plot to plant the flag of Islam over the ashes of the Twin Towers. Within days, Rauf was branded as an al-Qaeda operative and Islam was back on the front pages. This event provided a litmus test for the status and identity of post 9/11 Islam in the United States. The controversy demonstrated that the majority of Americans believed that Islam was foreign, ‘un-American’ and a threat (Altman 2010). For many American Muslims there followed a sense of despondency that if a prominent American Muslim spearheading interfaith dialogue in a very multicultural city such as New York was painted as a foreigner and a terrorist, then there was no need for others to try and engage the larger society.

It is difficult to separate American Christian views of Islam from those of American society in general. The deep and complicated relationship between Christianity as a dominant cultural force in American society proves to be a difficult web to untangle. The national fabric of US civic life continues to be driven in much of the country by an underlying Christian ethos, largely Evangelical and Catholic, while American historians carry on a persistent debate as to whether the Founding Fathers actually intended to create a Christian nation (Hutchison 2004). Nevertheless, Wil Herberg’s 1955 work, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: an essay in American religious sociology*, transformed American religious language to promote the notion of a ‘Judeo-Christian’ culture, from which Muslims, Hindus and members of other religious traditions are to this point left out. This debate over American identity can be clearly evidenced...
with the plethora of recent publications on ‘Islam in America’, or ‘American Islam’, as a response to the perceived threat of Muslims to American culture and values or of their celebrated participation in American society (Hammer and Safi 2013). An important part of this debate has focused upon demographics. While there are several studies on the number of Muslims in North America, there is no real agreement on numbers. Statistics have often been minimised in order to reduce the fear of an Islamic takeover or maximised to demonstrate Muslim participation in civic life (Pew Research 2011: 9–10). Regardless, Christian–Muslim relations in North America are guided by an historical Christian cultural ethos to which a Muslim minority responds. Consequently, this chapter will focus on a variety of dominant cultural North American Christian views of Islam and Muslims. Primary attention will be given to the United States. The term ‘America’ will be used synonymously with the United States, and ‘North America’ with the continent, including Canada and the Caribbean.

While there is certainly no one Christian view of Islam, we will pose four basic typologies of North American Christian views of Islam: Cultural despotism, Humanistic pluralism, Evangelical biblicism and Interreligious dialogue. These four typologies are woven into the ongoing history of Christian–Muslim relations in North America from the colonial period to post-9/11. Each of these typologies overlaps and to some degree shares three underlying themes. First, the fall-out over US foreign policy will continue to guide Christian–Muslim relations in post 9/11 North America for the foreseeable future. Second, there is the implicit (and in some cases explicit) belief that Islam is alien and ‘un-American’ (Wuthnow 2005: 35). Thus, American views of Islam have been mixed in with immigration debates. Finally, there is the ugly reality that the history of slavery and racism continues to be a very real presence. Race matters. Each of these typologies responds to these themes in a variety of ways. We will return to them in the conclusion.

**Cultural despotism**

During the height of the slave trade, the American colonies relied primarily on West African networks. European and American slavers looked down upon their African Muslim partners as despotic and barbaric. Africans were considered to be under the biblical curse of Ham (Genesis 9:18–25), and thus the slave traders felt justified in using and abusing Africans for economic and political gain (Goldenberg 2003). This biblical justification also provided licence for the cultural suppression of slave identities and their indigenous cultures.

During this same period the Barbary pirates of North Africa instigated a long war against North American commerce and took seafarers captive. As early as 1698, Cotton Mather, America’s first colonial theologian, responded to this crisis by noting that ‘God hath given up several of our sons into the hands of the fierce monsters of Africa. Mahometan, Turks, and Moors, and devils, are at this day oppressing many of our sons with a slavery, wherein they “wish for death, and cannot find it”’ (Kidd 2009: 5). The capture of American sailors and citizens and their enslavement by North African potentates between 1785 and 1815 prompted a national debate about the need for a federal navy to protect American citizens and provoked a cultural and religious outcry about the barbarity of such atrocities. The Barbary wars also stimulated a new American literary response, the novel, including Peter Markoe’s *The Algerine spy in Pennsylvania* (1787) and Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine captive* (1797) (Peskin 2009; Sha’ban 1991). Images of African pirates have continued to occur in American popular culture. The most recent example was the 2013 film, *Captain Phillips*.

The representation of the barbaric Muslim was popularised by American Protestants. Humphrey Prideaux, the Anglican Dean of Norwich, wrote *The true nature of imposture fully displayed*
in the life of Mahomet in 1697. This ubiquitous work argued that Muhammad duped his illiterate and impoverished fellow Arabs into believing he was a prophet so that they would follow his commands to pillage and plunder. The book was exported across the Atlantic and became a staple of American Christian discourse on Islam. It was placed in the new federal library system designed by Benjamin Franklin, and by 1796 the first American edition was printed in Philadelphia. Archibald Anderson of Princeton Seminary rationalised Islamic despotism in A brief outline of the evidences of the Christian religion in 1825.

Over the rich and salubrious regions, possessed by Muhammad, we behold a widespread desolation. The fairest portions of the globe where arts, literature of refinement formerly flourished, are now blighted. Every noble institution has sunk into oblivion. Despotism extends its iron scepter over these ill fated countries, and all the tranquility ever enjoyed, is the dead calm of ignorance and slavery.

(Alexander 1825: 179)

By contrast, he wrote, those countries where Christianity flourished were ‘happy’ and ‘prosperous’.

Tropes of Muhammad as warlord and a sexual deviant have continued to be recycled in North America. References to him as a ‘robber and brigand’ and a ‘terrorist’ have become commonplace in the years since 9/11, one of the most outspoken proponents of such views being the late Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Franklin Graham. Graham’s widely reported pejorative comments about Muhammad were made in response to the 2010 ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ controversy noted earlier (ABC News 2010). Finally, Muhammad’s polygamy prompted Americans to compare Islam with Mormonism, both originally considered deviant religions and dangerous to American values (Kinney 2010).

The ignorance and backwardness of Muslim cultures has been a prominent theme among American missionaries to majority-Muslim cultures. Henry Jessup (1832–1910) was a missionary in Syria. His works, including Women of the Arabs (1873), Syrian home life (1874) and The Mohammedan missionary problem (1879) disparaged both the culture and religion of Islam (Khalaf 1997). However, there was no one person who provided the English-speaking world with more images of Islam than Samuel Zwemer (1867–1952). This ‘Apostle to Islam’ wrote voluminous material and never tired of speaking to American audiences to introduce the public to the inferiority of Islamic cultures and the need for ongoing missions to save the Muslim world (Wilson 1952).

Such American Christian views of a barbaric Islam took on renewed interest in 1996 after Samuel P. Huntington’s The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order, in which he asserted that ‘Islam has bloody borders’. Furthermore, the attack on the American embassy in Tehran during the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Lebanese hostage crisis of the 1980s, 9/11, al-Qaeda, ISIS(L) and fear of home-grown terrorism have fostered this negative typology. The proponents of this viewpoint see a direct link between Muhammad and the rise of terrorism, which stands against American Christianity, in what GhaneaBassiri (2014: 114) calls the ‘conflation of race, religion and progress’.

**Humanistic pluralism**

Not all Americans who hold to the notion of American progress and enlightenment, however, have seen Muhammad and Islam as backward. Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought looked to reason and natural religion as a guiding source of inspiration for religious systems. In this vein, Muhammad was often seen as a philosopher king. The French philosopher Count de
Boulainvilliers (1658–1722) penned his classic *La vie de Mahomède* in 1730. The work was translated into English and, like other English Orientalist works of the day, quickly made an impact in the American colonies. It was during this period that Deists and Unitarians attacked Christian doctrines as being unreasonable and often held up Islam as a more dignified and reason-based religion (Morais 1934: 90). Reformist Muslims of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would later take up the arguments of the Deists and their critiques of Christianity as support for Islam.

While these positive views of Islam were argued from a general philosophy of religion, the Qurʾān, of course, became a major centrepiece of American thought on Islam. Another important European work to affect American thinking on Islam was the Englishman George Sale’s 1734 translation of the Qurʾān. His ‘Preliminary Discourse’ critiqued previous Orientalist views of Muḥammad that favoured the *Cultural despotism* perspective and argued that Muḥammad was a great leader who brought the Arabs out of ignorance. It was Sale’s translation that Thomas Jefferson ordered for his own personal use. Thomas Jefferson, a Deist, was interested in religious law that was strictly monotheistic. Influenced by the notion of Muḥammad as the ‘great legislator’, he believed Muḥammad’s role in developing communal laws could be of assistance to the fledgling United States, although there is no indication that he actually used the Qurʾān for any serious study in American law. Jefferson’s copy of the Qurʾān, now in the Smithsonian Museum, was used to swear in to public office the first American Muslim Congressman, Keith Ellison of Minnesota, in 2007.

While Deists such as Jefferson chafed at orthodox Christian beliefs such as the divinity of Jesus and the concept of the Trinity, they were equally interested in making sure that the young American republic removed any kind of religious test for public service and supported the freedom of religious practice. As Denise Spellberg has noted, while Islam played no direct part in the legal development of individual religious freedom, it was argued that theoretically there should be nothing to prevent a ‘Mohammedan’ from serving in public office, even the highest in the land (Spellberg 2013). The development of the religious test for public office and the separation clause of the Constitution ensured that Muslim Americans would have the right and ability to practice their faith and engage in civil society. This right has been promoted by numerous American Muslim civil rights organisations, including the Council of American Islamic Relations and the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

During the late eighteenth century, dominant American culture became intrigued with Islam. This was part of a general upper class fascination with the Orient. American authors began publishing their own romantic views of Islam, including Herman Melville’s *Clarel*, the longest American poem (Marr 2006: 262–72; Sha’ban 1991: 179–94). In 1849, the popular author Washington Irving wrote his own biography of Muḥammad. He repudiated the charge that Muḥammad was an impostor and believed he was a ‘man of great genius and suggestive imagination’ (Irving 1850: 271). While he acknowledged that the current form of the Qurʾān was manipulated by later Muslims, he refuted the idea that Muḥammad was anything but a sincere visionary who intended to create a religious community for the Arabs. Samuel Clemens (aka Mark Twain), however, in his serialised *Innocents abroad* of 1869, continued the philosophical ridicule of established religion, and Islam specifically, as backward and superstitious.

Interest in Islam continued to grow tremendously by the late nineteenth century and into the first quarter of the twentieth. Thus, the Transcendentalist movement of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and the Theosophist Society, founded by Helena Blavatsky and William Q. Judge, instigated a view of Islam as an oriental mystery religion. Prominent civic organisations such as the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (the Shriners), founded in 1870, utilised Islamic terms and symbols as part of this benign interest in the faith
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(Bowen 2011; Singleton 2007). Finally, the American convert to Islam Alexander Webb created a public sensation about the mysterious nature of Islam when he represented Islam at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 (Singleton 2007a).

Until 1979 most Americans saw Islam as a curious but remote religion. While Christian missionaries provided images of wayward Muslim cultures in need of being enlightened, much of North American society was intrigued with Islam as part of its fascination with the Orient. However, the Iranian Revolution prompted Americans to see Islam as a threat to the American way of life. Many Christians began to re-evaluate their views of this benign religion.

**Evangelical Biblicism**

The most prevalent of all types of American Christian responses to Islam is what is called the *Evangelical Biblicist*. In this type the Bible serves as the primary reference point to interpret the place and role of Islam in an American Christian world view. As noted by religious historians Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, the ubiquity of the Bible in American culture provides ‘a vast reservoir of themes, phrases, meanings, and habits of thinking’ (Hatch and Noll 1982: 3). This is especially true with regard to Islam.

We have already noted an important biblical reference to support and perpetuate slavery. The belief in the inferiority of Africans was fed by biblical notions of racial and religious superiority of what has come to be known as the Hamitic curse in Genesis 9:20–7 (Johnson 2004). Even among those Americans who abhorred the institution of slavery, most did accept a biblical narrative of racial superiority and thus required the civilization and Christianization of the Africans. Edward Blyden (1832–1912) was an exception to most American Christian authors, arguing in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* in 1887 that Islam was well suited towards the culture of Africa and should be seen as a step towards civilizing ‘pagan’ Africans. (He ultimately converted to Islam later in life.) It was this exacting racial view that underlined the ‘re-version’ of African Americans to Islam through the teachings of Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association, the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam (Howell 2013: 53–7). The recovery of the identity of Islam among African slaves has become an important project in the study of Islam in America (Austin 1997; Diouf 1998; Gomez 2005; Turner 2003).

Building upon English Protestant sources, America’s first colonial theologian Cotton Mather not only fitted the ‘Turk’ into the category of the Barbary, but helped to develop the popular trope of Islam as ‘Gog and Magog’ or even as the Antichrist of Revelation (Kidd 2009: 9). It was, however, Jonathan Edwards who made the Biblicist view of Islam popular in the eighteenth century. As one of the leading figures of the Great Awakening, Edwards included Islam and ‘Mahomet’ in his overall eschatological world view that reflected growing awareness of the Islamic world. He wrote that Satan was ruling over the ‘false Christian kingdom’ (Rome), the ‘kingdom of the false prophet’ (Islam) and the ‘heathen kingdom’ (India and beyond). All these kingdoms were certainly failing and giving way to the rise of a rational and prosperous Christian kingdom (Kidd 2009: 16).

Edward’s eighteenth-century millennialist views of Islam were carried into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through what Timothy Marr calls an ‘eschatological imagination’ (Marr 2006: 94). American Christians looked for Muhammad and Islam within the pages of the Bible in conjunction with the end times, one popular reference being the image of the locusts rising from the smoke in Revelation 9:3. As the Ottoman Empire struggled for survival in the face of European imperial gains, some American missionaries wrote to their constituency that the dark veil of Muhammad was soon to be crushed. William Goodell and Henry Jessup were two missionaries living and working in the Ottoman Empire who developed and
perpetuated popular notions of an enemy Islamic empire that would soon give way to an enlightened evangelical Protestantism. During the Crimean War (1853–56), in an attempt to garner the support of the Western powers against the Russian Orthodox Empire, Sultan Abdulmecid proclaimed the *Hatti Hamayun* that declared all subjects to be equal regardless of religion. The missionaries saw this as a sign from God of the collapse of Islam (Prime 1891: 385–7).

By the twentieth century, the most prominent American missionary to impact public views of Islam was the indefatigable Reformed Church missionary Samuel Zwemer, who spent his life as a missionary working towards the conversion of Muslims (Vander Werff 1982: 191). From 1891 to 1912 he lived as an itinerant throughout the Arabian Gulf before moving to Cairo. There he organised and directed a Christian missionary centre for the study of Islam until he accepted a teaching position at Princeton Seminary from 1928 until his retirement. He was the author of ‘50 books in English, six in Arabic, 24 tracts for Muslims’, a participant in the 1910 Edinburgh conference and the editor of the journal *The Moslem World* (later *The Muslim World*) from 1911 to 1947 (Vander Werff 1982: 191). While he never shied away from his belief in converting Muslims to Christianity, his years of reading Islamic texts and his study of al-Ghazâlî prompted him to nuance his views, so that he came to accept that Islam provided an avenue for Muslims to seek God, even though this religious view was incomplete. As the ‘Apostle to Islam’ no one person has had more of an effect on the modern American Evangelical view on Islam as Zwemer. His perspectives continue to influence Christian thinking on Islam in various seminaries around North America, including Fuller and Trinity Theological Seminaries. The most prominent inheritors of Zwemer’s views include Dudley Woodbury and Phil Parshall.

While Zwemer came to appreciate aspects of Islam, other more vocal American evangelical leaders have looked with disdain on Islam, especially after 9/11. We have already noted the pejorative cultural views of Falwell, Robertson, Vines and Graham, labelling Muhammad as an evil scourge. Other Evangelical authors have used biblical interpretations to further explore the nefarious origins of Islam. In Florida in 2009 Pastor Terry Jones wrote *Islam is of the Devil*. The popular dispensationalist Hal Lindsey in *The everlasting hatred: The roots of Jihad* (2002, 2011) has explored the Bible to explain how Islam will lead the world towards the cataclysm of Armageddon. As the War on Terror has widened to include the reality of terrorist plots in North America, the *Evangelical Biblicist* response has grown to become the most widely accepted typology that has provided some form of solace for a dominant Christian culture living in fear.

**Interreligious dialogue**

The Transcendentalists of the late nineteenth century fostered interest in other religions in America. These were not, however, normative Christian perspectives. It was Vatican II (1962–5), which in its 1965 document *Nostra aetate* declared that the Church viewed Muslims with ‘esteem’, that prompted a wholesale North American Christian interest in interfaith dialogue with Islam. This was followed by the World Council of Churches 1979 document ‘Dialogue of peoples with other living faiths and ideologies’. These official ecclesiastical documents prompted novel American reflection on other religions, especially Islam. The Canadian Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000) has proven to be the one of the most influential thinkers regarding religious pluralism and dialogue in North America. A pastor of the United Church of Canada, Smith was best known for his teaching at McGill and Harvard Universities. He argued against the uniqueness of Christianity as a religious system as he directly engaged with Muslim scholars and students (Smith 2007: 114). He did not go as far as the British pluralist John Hick (1922–2012) whose works *The myth of God Incarnate, The myth of Christian uniqueness* and *God has many names* prompted mainstream Christians to begin accepting theological pluralism. Other
important proponents of interfaith dialogue with Islam have been the Roman Catholics John Borelli (Georgetown) and Leonard Swidler (Temple University), and the Episcopalian Miroslav Wolf (Yale Divinity School).

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the US (NCC) began a dialogue with Muslims in 1979 under the direction of Marston Speight. The offices were originally housed at Hartford Seminary and the Duncan Black MacDonald Center for the Study of Islam but later moved to the NCC offices in New York. The Center had long been known as a missionary training school and the publishing house of Zwemer’s *The Muslim World* since 1938. This movement from missiology to interfaith dialogue marked an important shift in the views on Islam among Christians of this type. Dialogue initiatives have often been led by former missionaries in Muslim-majority countries, including Speight, a United Methodist missionary in North Africa, Richard H. Drummond, a former UCC missionary, Mark Thomsen, the Lutheran Director of Global Mission, and Harold Vogelaar, a Reformed Church in America Islamicist.

The NCC has continued to develop programmes and official responses to Islam, especially a reply to the 2007 *A Common Word* document (www.ncccusa.org/news/ecumenicalresponse.html#_ftn1). The Presbyterian Church–U.S.A., however, led the way among denominations in developing programmes for Christian–Muslim dialogue in the 1980s (Haines and Cooley 1987) and has continued with the 2010 assembly approval of *Toward an understanding of Christian–Muslim relations* (www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/interfaithrelations/pdf/toward_an_understanding_of_Christian–Muslim_relations.pdf). The Episcopal Church convened an official Christian–Muslim committee in 1993, after the events of the Gulf War and the bombing of the Twin Towers in New York (Mosher 2013: 97). Following 9/11 the Episcopal Church stepped up a variety of dialogues for the purpose of ‘reconciliation’ between Christians and Muslims. This dialogue initiative was further supported by the former Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, whose *Building Bridges Seminar* commenced after 9/11 and is now housed at Georgetown University (http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/the-building-bridges-seminar). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has followed the mainline denominational movement towards creating dialogues and activities, including its Lutheran–Muslim Consultative Panel. Other mainline denominations, from the American Baptist Churches to the UCC as well as the Conference of Catholic Bishops, have been active in responding to *A Common Word* and in supporting the *Shoulder to Shoulder* programme (http://www.shouldertoshouldercampaign.org/about/). Regional and local dialogue programmes have grown dramatically among these churches as a direct result of 9/11 (Duggan, Grafton and Harris 2013: 84–92). Even evangelical organisations have responded to *A Common Word*. Fuller Seminary, for example, has fully contributed to the ‘Muslim and Evangelical’ consultations (www.newevangelicalpartnership.org/?q=node/15; http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/third-evangelical-christian-muslim-consultation; http://fullermag.com/reflections-christian-muslim-dialogue/).

Proponents of what is being termed here the *Interreligious dialogue* approach to Islam have a variety of rationales for their positions. Some engage simply for the sake of seeking more accurate information about Islam, others seek positive inter-communal relations, while others see dialogue as a positive avenue toward a Christian witness in hopes of sharing the Gospel with Muslims. Although the ambiguity of this perspective has prompted suspicion by Muslim interlocutors, American Muslim associations, such as the Islamic Society of North America, Islamic Circle of North America, North American Imams Federation and the International Institute of Islamic Thought have begun to embrace formal relationships with Christian denominations and institutions, primarily as a result of their awareness of continued suspicions of Islam after 9/11. American Muslim associations are keen to demonstrate their positive role in American life.
Post 9/11 challenges

Christian–Muslim relations in North America will continue to be influenced by three factors: US foreign policy in Muslim-majority countries, the battle over American identity within an increasingly diverse population, and racism.

Every president since Jimmy Carter has attempted some form of peace initiative and has failed to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the Muslim communities of the Middle East. While one might point to American support for the state of Israel and its refusal to recognise a Palestinian state as a primary cause of this, its historic support for despotic or undemocratic regimes is also seen as hypocritical. Frustration and anger towards US foreign policies of the 1991–92 Gulf War bubbled up to an unprecedented level on 9/11, and the resulting invasion of Iraq in 2003 has been viewed as proof of American imperialist aspirations (Khalidi 2004). These foreign policy issues continue to drive Muslim responses that will motivate extremists. In response, US policies will only tighten to protect the homeland, which will put further pressure on Muslims in the Americas. A dominant evangelical Christian culture seems convinced about the despotic nature of Islam and will support a ‘clash of religions’ narrative for such policies. This will continue to support the typologies of Cultural despotism and Evangelical Biblicism. Currently, the typological views have been fairly systematically divided according to American political parties (Lipka 2015). The voices supporting Humanistic pluralism or Interreligious dialogue, and those churches that engage in pacifism, have been drowned out due to growing public fear and the rise of Islamophobia. Given this, it will be hard to break this cycle unless there is a shift in the percentage of those following the other typologies. To this point, Christian church leaders have had little exposure to Islam in their training (Gortner et al. 2013), although many North American seminaries are now beginning to expose their students to some form of Christian–Muslim relations, and some even require their students to undertake this engagement. An interfaith initiative by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, the Christian Hospitality and Pastoral Practices Project, has yielded positive results as dominant culture Christians have engaged in practices of cultural and religious diversity (www.ats.edu/resources/current-initiatives/christian-hospitality-and-pastoral-practices).

For their part, American Muslims have little social capital in the larger American political structure and have yet to gain a hearing from mainstream media sources or to engage consistently with them. Thus, they have no clear voice. However, there are positive indications that relations are improving in this area, and Islamic institutions continue to organise and reach out to denominational and civic partners (Moore 2014: 143). There is also progress in developing indigenous theological institutions to train imams and Muslim leaders. Programmes in Hartford, Chicago and Hayward, California, as well as several other recent initiatives, indicate that North American Muslim seminaries will not be long in materialising. Muslim chaplains present within hospitals and the military represent a growing public recognition of religious diversity. This will assist Muslim voices being heard more clearly and more often.

The second issue that will continue to impact relations is concern over immigration. In the introduction to this chapter we noted that Islam has been and continues to be viewed as foreign to ‘American-ness.’ The dominant narrative of a white, Christian religious culture captures the fervour and imagination against real and perceived threats at home and abroad. The majority of Americans by and large remain ignorant of the complex demographics of American Muslim communities. Because they are a numerical minority composed of a wide variety of ethnic and racial communities and represent a disparate patchwork of both the immigrant story of the Americas, as well as the still disenfranchised African American minority, Muslims in America will continue to struggle for a uniform voice in the public square. The growth of a Latino/a American Muslim community simply
adds to the fear of a dominant white Christian culture that is ambivalent about its Latino minority and Islam. The ongoing concerns about illegal or legal immigration will continue to trump the growth of any Christian–Muslim dialogue. This can be demonstrated by the backlash against public images of Muslims in popular media in North America. While the US-based reality TV programme All-American Muslim was cancelled after one season, in Canada the CBC Little mosque on the prairie ran for six full seasons. While accepted in Canada, Little mosque provided caricatures of immigrant and convert Muslims that were too sensitive for US society.

The final issue that will continue to plague Christian–Muslim relations in the Americas is racism. While African Americans represent the single largest ethnic/racial community of Muslims in the US, their voice and presence in American Christian–Muslim relationships is fairly minimal. A significant amount of research has been undertaken to expose the important history and identity of African Muslim slaves. In addition, black American rap music has provided access to Islam for a new generation of African Americans seeking to voice their identities. But despite this, African Americans, or black Americans, are often overlooked by dominant American Christian culture, which still holds Black Islam in deep suspicion, based upon Black Nationalist roots. Immigrant Muslim communities also look with suspicion upon what they perceive to be an ‘American Islam’ that is not orthodox (Howell 2014). This is in spite of the fact that the late Warith Deen Muhammad brought the majority of Black Muslims back within Sunnī orthodoxy during his early years of leadership. Certainly racism plays a role within intra-Muslim as well as interfaith relationships. Given the ongoing racial tensions in the United States and the growing economic gaps between a dominant white culture and disenfranchised black communities, Christian–Muslim relations will continue to be affected by the racial divide.

Notes

1 The Pew Research study on ‘Muslims in America’ puts the figure at 2.75 million in the US: http://pewresearch.org/pubs/483/muslim-americans, 9–10; the ‘Mapping the global Muslim population’ report estimates that there are 4.6 million Muslims in all of the Americas: www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/; some studies have estimated as many as 10 million Muslims.


3 Huntington’s work first appeared as ‘Clash of civilizations’, in Foreign Affairs (Summer 1993) 22–49, and in 1996 was expanded into The clash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order.

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**Further reading**