



## Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

### WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Those who spiritually, religiously, politically, and/or culturally identify as practitioners of the Islamic faith.

### HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Hollywood rarely acknowledges Muslims' contributions to humanity (e.g., centuries of inventions) *and* the impact of colonialization and imperialism on Muslims the world over. This practice, along with falsely depicting Muslims as violent, dehumanizes them as a people. Far right terrorists, not Muslim extremists, have been responsible for 73% of domestic terrorism fatalities from 2009 through 2018, per a 2019 study by the Anti-Defamation League. Reducing Muslims to only negative stereotypes has led to devastating consequences such as hate crimes against Muslims, Sikhs, and other non-Muslims, and oppressive government policies (e.g., the Muslim Ban).

### OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Extremists:** Muslims as violent, irrational, anti-Semitic, and/or terrorists/jihadis\* who threaten the U.S. propagates the falsehoods that 1) the word "Muslim" equals "terrorist" and 2) the Quran promotes violence.
- **The "Good" Muslim:** Muslims as only *tokenized* U.S. government agents or first responders fighting Muslim terrorists. The tokenization creates the illusion of a fair/balanced story when, in actuality, it simply justifies Muslim terrorist stories and perpetuates the lie that all or even a majority of Muslims are somehow tied to terrorism.

## MUSLIMS

- **Brown Girl/White Knight:** Oppressed Muslim women (e.g., demure hijabi\*/married off to a relative) or overly sexualized (e.g., harem girls/belly dancers) relying on "white saviors" to rescue them from oppressive, lascivious Muslim men and violent practices (e.g., genital mutilation, which Islam *doesn't* condone). These depictions perpetuate historical fantasies that Muslim women are simply props and/or victims waiting for white men to save them.
  - **Brown Foreign "Other":** Muslims as the dangerous brown "other" (usually immigrant Arab\* or South Asian), and/or possessing highly-limited work options (e.g., gas station owners, cab drivers, shop owners). These narrow characterizations ignore that Islam is the world's most racially diverse religion, Muslims span all ethnicities/nationalities and work in myriad professions. Note: U.S. white Muslims are too often portrayed as "innocent" Americans infected by the Islam "virus."
  - **Identity Crisis:** Muslims confused or at odds with cultural and/or religious identity (e.g., women who hate Islam and rebel against their families) and who leave one or both for secular lives. These characterizations exacerbate the simplistic, false narrative that Muslims don't enjoy their faith and only seek "superior" secular life.
  - **Toxic Masculinity and Sexist Depictions:** Repeatedly portraying Muslim Men as emotionally closed, sexist/polygamist, homophobic, etc., falsely presumes they're monoliths and the behaviors and traits are due solely to religion and not also heavily affected by cultural influences. Also, though Islam allows for polygamy under very specific circumstances, it's a very uncommon practice.
  - **Nuanced Muslim Women:** Depict Muslim women with *agency*; and as professionals, in leadership roles, as social, and generally out in the world. Also avoid fetishization of the hijab\*. Muslim women wear hijabs for a variety of reasons including personal preference, cultural influences and the law (see "Hijab" in the glossary for more). Many non-hijabis identify strongly as Muslim, few hijabis are desperate to uncover their heads away from family, and most hijabis in Western cultures wear the hijab by choice and due to faith, even though it makes them targets of hate crimes.
  - **Cultural Muslims:** Muslims are more than their religion and vary in the role religion plays in their everyday lives. They might be unobservant but feel connected to Islam because of family background, personal experiences, or environment. Even if unobservant, stories don't have to *revolve* around that.
  - **Reframed POV:** Frame Islam through authentic Muslim characters' POVs, not a Western values' lens.
  - **Middle-Ground:** Depict Muslims who, often in the U.S., land somewhere between *always* using religious visual signifiers (e.g., hijabs, kufis/skullcaps, beards) and *never* using, signifying only secular lives.
  - **Work:** Muslims in mainstream professions (e.g., bankers, teachers, lawyers, first responders, doctors, etc.).
  - **Beyond Faith:** More than just faith-related conflicts (typically dramatized around sex, alcohol, eating pork).
  - **Faith/Multi-Faith:** Depict multi-faith and mixed-race families, friendships, and Muslims collaborating with other faith groups specifically to address xenophobia, Islamophobia\*, and anti-Semitism.
- ### THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

  - **Varied Experiences/Identities:** Explore experiences that encompass a range of identities such as gender, sexual, and ethnic (e.g., queer, women, Uyghurs); also explore contributions to humanity and U.S. society from innovations in technology, sciences, arts, culture, etc., that influenced and continue to influence myriad areas (e.g., Silicon Valley, NASA, etc.).
- "Muslims are more than their religion and vary in the role that religion plays in their everyday lives."

\*Denotes a term in the glossary

## QUICK FACTS

- ➔ Islam is the 2nd largest religion globally after Christianity.
- ➔ Muslims live on every continent but Antarctica; are from every country; have lived in the Americas for 500+ years. As of 2017, 3.45 million live in the U.S. (1.1% of U.S. population).
- ➔ The U.S. Muslim community is incredibly diverse: women, men, non-binary, queer, secular, faith-based, African, Arab, Black, South Asian, East Asian, Latinx, white, etc.
- ➔ 5% (50,000) of U.S. physicians are Muslim.
- ➔ “Islam” means “peace through submitting to God’s will.” “Muslim” is a term referring to adherents of Islam. “Peace be upon you” (“As-salamu alaykum”) is the universal Muslim greeting and “Upon you be peace” (“Alaykum as-salām”) is the response.

## ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- Georgia Health News: [“In Warner Robins, Muslim doctors play a key role”](#)
- Huffington Post: [“Muslim Ban Remix: Weakening American National Security”](#)
- Institute for Social Policy and Understanding: [“A Window Into American Muslim Physicians”](#)
- Maytha Alhassen, Ph.D.: [“Haqq & Hollywood: Illuminating 100 Years of Muslim Tropes and How to Transform Them”](#)
- MOST: [“Quick Take: Did You Know?”](#)
- MPAC: [The Obeidi-Alsultany Test](#)
- Pew Research Center: [“Black Muslims account for a fifth of all U.S. Muslims, and about half are converts to Islam”](#)
- Pillars Fund
- Sapelo Square: [“To Be Muslim And Cool”](#)
- StepFeed

## GLOSSARY

### Arab and/or Muslim:

Arabs are one of many ethnicities that practice Islam. But not all Arabs are Muslim; 7% adhere to other religions (e.g., approximately 5% of Arabs are Christian; approximately 63% of U.S. Arabs are Christian, 24% Muslim, 13% are other or have no religious affiliation).

### Hijab/Hijabi:

Hijab is a head covering or headscarf (in some communities called “khimar”) worn in public by some Muslim women. A hijabi is a woman who wears a hijab. Muslim women are legally mandated to wear hijabs *only* in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Indonesian province of Aceh.

### Islamophobia:

Extreme fear of and hostility toward Islam and Muslims, often leading to hate speech and hate crimes, social and political discrimination.

### Jihad/Jihadi:

Jihad literally means “strive and struggle for God,” which encompasses an internal struggle towards personal betterment. A jihadi is one who strives and struggles for God. Jihad is *not* an order to murder and doesn’t mean “terrorism.”

### Sharia:

Sharia literally means “the clear, well-trodden path to water.” It’s a code of conduct for all aspects of Muslim life, derived from the Quran and Hadiths (Islamic text about the Prophet Mohammed’s life). Sharia is *not* a set of laws to infiltrate America.

For in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms (Allah, Black Muslim, Mohammed, Muslim/Islam, Muslim Ban), please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#).

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[MuslimARC.org](https://MuslimARC.org)



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A list of the most up-to-date  
contact information for all  
of our partner organizations  
can be found on our website:  
[WriteInclusion.org/factsheets](https://WriteInclusion.org/factsheets)

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:



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