

# Selected Chronology: Muslims in Brooklyn

Timeline by the Brooklyn Historical Society  
Muslims in Brooklyn Curriculum

**Before 1900**

## The Long History of Muslims in Brooklyn

Brooklyn's earliest Muslim Americans were likely enslaved Africans. For many, the preservation of their religious practices, Arabic language, and music served as resistance against the horrors of American chattel slavery — though little evidence exists of their lives. Many generations later, at the end of the 19th century, a convert to Islam named Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb established one of the first Muslim gathering spaces in New York's recorded history. In the following decades, Muslim communities in Brooklyn, New York City, and the nation would grow significantly as people converted to the faith or emigrated from all corners of the world.

**[Era context image]**

Harry Fenn

New York Slave Market about 1730, 1902

New York Public Library

Other resolutions available here:

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-4097-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

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**1900–1930**

## Early Congregations

In the early 1900s, growing numbers of immigrants came to the United States from Eastern Europe. Among them were Muslim Tatars from Russia, Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania. Many settled in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. In 1907, they formed one of the earliest Muslim congregations in Brooklyn. They gathered for services in homes and in rented spaces until 1931, when they opened the Moslem Mosque, one of the first mosques in the country. The small but tight-knit congregation remains there today.

**[Era context image]**

*[citation]*

Moslem Mosque, circa 1934

Courtesy of Moslem Mosque, Inc. archives

1930–1950

## Migrations and Growth

During these decades, Brooklyn Heights and Downtown Brooklyn became an epicenter of Muslim life in Brooklyn, thanks to migrations to and within New York City. In 1939, Caribbean-born Shaikh Daoud Faisal and his wife Khadijah established the Islamic Mission of America, also known as the State Street Mosque, in Brooklyn Heights. Early congregants included sailors from Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan, whose ships docked nearby on Brooklyn’s bustling piers, as well as African American converts to Islam. In the 1940s, Arab communities that had been evicted from Lower Manhattan’s “Little Syria” to make way for the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel began settling along Atlantic Avenue. These communities were of many faiths, but their presence drew Muslim immigrants from Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria who came to the United States in greater numbers after World War II.

[Era context image]

[citation]

John D. Morrell  
Fovad Alwan Pastries and Rashid Sales Co., 1958  
V1974.4.861  
Brooklyn Historical Society

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1950–1970

## Civil Rights and Muslim Life

African American Muslims were actively engaged during the many decades of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Representing a diversity of spiritual and political approaches, these movements confronted social injustice within local communities and on a national scale. The Nation of Islam-affiliated Muhammad’s Mosque No. 7C was founded in the early 1960s in Bedford-Stuyvesant; its affiliation changed in the following decades and it was later renamed Masjid Abdul Muhsin Khalifah. Masjid Khalifah and other local African American mosques promoted community self-determination and autonomy through an established network of institutions including schools, local businesses, and crime prevention groups.

[Era context image]

Image available here: <https://www.loc.gov/item/95516971/>

[citation]

[Malcolm X, half-length portrait, facing right], 1964, photographic print, 95516971; Library of Congress.

1970–1990

## Brooklyn’s Diverse Muslim Communities

In 1965, Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolished quotas that had previously prevented immigration from predominantly Muslim countries. Over the following decades, new arrivals established Arab communities in Bay Ridge and Brooklyn Heights, Bangladeshi communities in Kensington and East New York, and Pakistani communities in Midwood and Brighton Beach. They formed lasting institutions, including Masjid Mosab Bin Umair in Bay Ridge and Masjid Al-Aman in East New York. African American Muslims also built new traditions in growing black communities in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, Bushwick, Brownsville, and East New York. These included the Ansaar Allah community, the Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earths, a revived Nation of Islam, and Sunni communities like the Dar ul Islam and Masjid at-Taqwa.

**[Era context image]**

*[citation]*

Razvi family portrait, Lahore, Pakistan, 1976

Razvi family personal collection

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1990–2000

## Brooklyn’s Muslim Cultures Go National

In the 1990s, Brooklyn’s Muslim communities began to gain an audience on a national stage. The first Muslim to lead invocation before a session of the House of Representatives was Imam Siraj Wahhaj of Masjid at-Taqwa in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Brooklyn’s hip-hop music, dance, and graffiti and art scene, growing since the 1970s, incorporated philosophies and iconography of many local Muslim communities, such as Sunni, Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earths, and Nation of Islam. By the 1990s, Brooklyn-born artists like Jay-Z and Mos Def were producing music that reflected different aspects of Muslim influence for national and international audiences.

**[Era context image]**

*[citation]*

Joe Conzo

Jay-Z at the Brooklyn Hip Hop Festival, 2014

Courtesy of the Joe Conzo archives

2000–2010

## Crisis and Leadership

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, many Muslim Americans were unjustly targeted by law enforcement. The number of indiscriminate arrests and deportations rose sharply in communities where people appeared to be Muslim or had Muslim names. Residents of affected Brooklyn neighborhoods banded together to help neighbors understand their rights and locate missing family members. These informal networks led to the creation of social service and advocacy organizations, including the Arab American Association of New York, the Council of Peoples Organization, and the Bangladeshi American Community Development and Youth Services. Community leaders worked hard to reclaim public narratives about Muslim Americans and increase positive visible celebrations of faith and culture. In 2005, the first Iftar dinner hosted by a Borough President took place in Brooklyn.

[Era context image]

[citation]

Pre-Ramadan meeting, 2008

Courtesy of Council of People's Organization (COPO)

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2010–Present

## Organizing for Change

In the past several years, politicians and media figures have stoked xenophobic fears about Muslims, resulting in continued harassment, stereotyping, and unjust profiling. Yet robust networks and institutions, built over decades of organizing, have allowed Muslim Brooklynites to understand their rights and effect change. After an Associated Press report revealed widespread NYPD surveillance of Muslim communities, affected Brooklyn residents filed a class action lawsuit and won, strengthening legal protection to prevent future abuses. In 2017, in response to a presidential executive order that barred entry to people from seven Muslim majority nations, Yemeni bodega owners organized a citywide strike and a rally attended by thousands. In 2016, after years of citizen-led campaigns, New York City Public Schools recognized Muslim Eid holidays.

[Era context image]

[citation]

Joey O'Loughlin

Eid in Bedford-Stuyvesant, 2019