

## “AMERICAN ISLAMIC IDENTITY”

**FOR LESSON**

*Eid and Ramadan  
in Brooklyn*

**NARRATOR** **Stacey Salimah-Bell**

**RUN TIME 3:07**



**SALIMAH-BELL** We did Scouts on Friday evenings. Lots of fun things. The one thing that I loved about – not the one thing. There were so many things. But one of the major things I loved about doing Scouts there is I got – I brought some of the African American girls, we had Pakistani girls, we had Arab girls, we had African girls. And the one thing that’s great about this country, when Muslims converge, is you start to see what’s cultural and what’s Islamic. When those girls sat in a circle and I asked them one question, “What do you eat when you break fast during Ramadan? Do you eat something traditional?” So the West African girls were like, “Yes.” There were clearly things that were the same. And we knew that those things were the Islamic things. So when someone says, “I break my fast with dates, with water,” that’s something traditional that the Prophet Muhammad did. But then, when we start diverging – but for my **iftar**, my meal, what I have is, “I have rice and beans.” That came from the girl who was Puerto Rican. “I have **plátanos maduro**.” That was from the girl who was Puerto Rican. From the Black girls, “Well, my mother made mac and cheese,” or, “She fried chicken,” or, “She had baked r— you know, roasted, baked chicken. We had greens.” And then some of the girl— “Well, that’s not Muslim.” And I would say, “Who says? Clearly, it’s Muslim. We eat different foods. We’re supposed to have our culture. And that’s something else that the Prophet Muhammad said to the **ummah**. So Islamic is breaking it with the dates and the water. Everything else that we did was not necessarily Islamic. It was your culture.” And what happens there is the girls start to get insight. Like, they understand why they’re doing things. And then they can decide for themselves what they will keep and what they will get rid of. But clearly, it’s nothing wrong with keeping those cultural

**IFTAR**

the sunset meal  
on a day of fasting.

**PLÁTANOS  
MADURO**

ripe plantains  
that are fried,  
boiled or baked.

**UMMAH**

Arabic word  
for “community”  
or “nation.”  
Generally refers  
to Muslim  
believers as  
a collective.

traditions. But don't pass it off as Islam. And now they know that it's not. We even discussed the fact — I would take them to different masjid, or different mosques, around the city. And when we go to mine, Khalifah, it was open, there was no division, and the girls were like, wow. But, yet, it was hard — we were hard-pressed to find Pakistani mosques that we can go to because those women did not go pray outside of the house. So they had to sit. And I wanted them to use the Quran. Use it. Go back to the book. And you tell me where it says that this is good or this is not.... So hearing different traditions educates them. And you become American Muslim. You begin to establish an American Islamic identity.

**BIO** Stacey Salimah-Bell was born in 1963 in Brooklyn, where she was raised in Bensonhurst. She spent more than 20 years working for the New York City Department of Correction, eventually rising to the rank of captain. Salimah-Bell was involved in a successful class-action lawsuit against the New York City Department of Correction for sexual harassment. She was a founding member of the American Muslim Law Enforcement Officers Association and of the Muslims Employed in City Corrections Association. She also served as vice president of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society Jean Sampson Scott Greater New York Chapter.

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