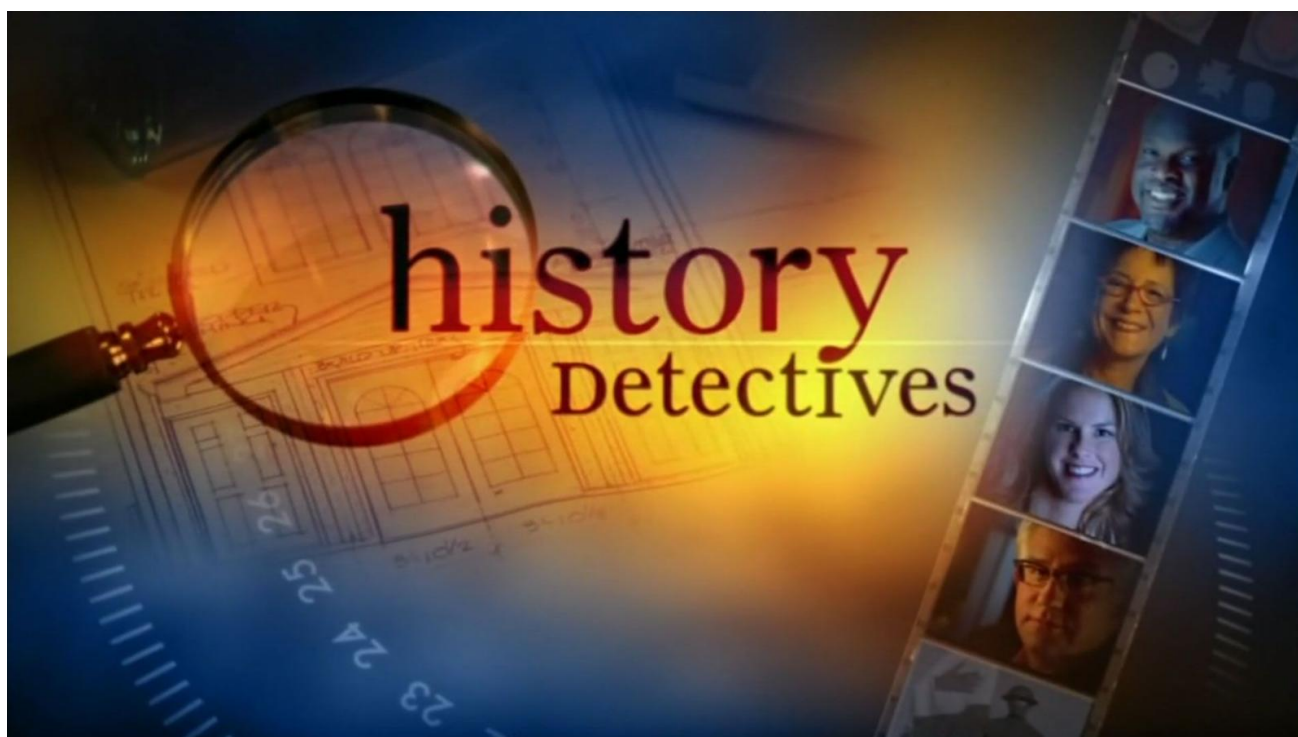


PBS Backdating and Exaggerating the Muslim Presence in the U.S.

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The PBS Series “The History Detectives” some years ago included a program on Islam in America – that is, on the history of Muslims in America, a history that we were asked to believe until recently had supposedly remained “hidden.” Here is part of the text for that program, available online.

“When the first Muslims came to the land that would become the United States is unclear. Many historians claim that the earliest Muslims came from the Senegambian region of Africa in the early 14th century. It is believed they were Moors, expelled from Spain, who made their way to the Caribbean and possibly to the Gulf of Mexico.”

It may be unclear exactly when Muslims came to North America,

but what is clear to historians is that when Columbus arrived in 1492 there were no Muslims to be found, no archaeological evidence has ever been found of such an early Muslim presence in the New World. The PBS text airily refers to “many historians” who claim that Senegambian Muslims were in the territory that would become the United States in the 14th century. Who are those “many historians”? PBS doesn’t say. It doesn’t name even one because such a historian does not exist. There is no evidence that West Africans were shipbuilders, much less capable of building vessels large enough to cross the Atlantic from Africa to the New World. It’s a fairy tale fabricated to persuade us that the Muslim presence goes way back; a bit of propagandistic backdating to embellish the preposterous tale that “Islam has always been part of America’s story,” as Obama famously proclaimed in his speech at Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

When Columbus made his journey to the United States, it is said he took with him a book written by Portuguese Muslims who had navigated their way to the New World in the 12th century.

“It is said”? Is that a historical source – “it is said”? Columbus made no mention of such a book “by Portuguese Muslims” who “had navigated their way to the New World in the 12th century.” Nor did anyone else. Online searches reveal no sources for such a claim. No one mentions this book, save for today’s Muslim propagandists and their ignorant non-Muslim collaborators – like those who prepared the PBS script on Muslims predating Columbus. Why didn’t the PBS authors offer a source for this tall tale?

Others claim there were Muslims, most notably a man named Istafan, who accompanied the Spanish as a guide to the New World in the early 16th century in their conquest of what would become Arizona and New Mexico.

“Others claim there were Muslims”? Who are these unidentified “others”? Where are the sources, where is the evidence? What is known is that “Muslims” were not in the New world in the early 16th century. There was exactly one man, known as “Istafan” or “Estevanico”(Little Stephen) who, though undoubtedly raised as a Muslim in Morocco, was almost certainly a Catholic convert. Spain did not allow non-Catholics to travel to the New World, and historians believe that “Istafan” was required to convert to Roman Catholicism in order to join the Narvaez expedition.

His existence is known from an account written by another member of the expedition, Cabeza de Vaca. What PBS ought to have written is this: “Istafan, a Catholic who had converted from Islam, was part of the Narvaez Expedition to what is the American West, and though not a Muslim, was the first person of Muslim descent in the New World.”

What is clear is the make up of the first real wave of Muslims in the United States: African slaves of whom 10 to 15 percent were said to be Muslims. Maintaining their religion was difficult and many were forcibly converted to Christianity. Any effort to practice Islam, and keep the traditional clothing and names alive had to be done in secret. There was an enclave of African-Americans on the Georgia coast that managed to maintain their faith until the early part of the 20th century.

There is again no evidence to support the claim that 10-15% of the slaves were Muslims. These inflated figures have begun to appear only in the last few decades, in books and articles by such people as Yousef Mroueh, an amateur historian who claims to have a doctorate, but no evidence of such doctorate can be found. Had that many slaves been Muslims, surely it would have been noticed and recorded by the plantation owners, or by the overseers, but there are no such records. Nor did other slaves make any mention of these “Muslim” slaves. There are about a

half-dozen slaves who are known to have been Muslims when they arrived from Africa. They did not have with them Qur'ans; they built no mosques; they were living in an environment where the slaves were converted to Christianity, and it would have been impossible to maintain, much less pass on to their children, their Muslim faith. This claim that 10-15% of slaves were Muslims was not made until very late in the 20th century, when Muslims were engaged in a mighty effort to exaggerate both their numbers in the U.S., and how long Muslims had been in America.

Between 1878 and 1924, Muslim immigrants from the Middle East, particularly from Syria and Lebanon, arrived in large numbers, with many settling in Ohio, Michigan, Iowa and even the Dakotas. Like most other migrants they were seeking greater economic opportunity than in their homeland and often worked as manual laborers. One of the first big employers of Muslims and blacks was the Ford Company—these were often the only people willing to work in the hot, difficult conditions of the factories.

There were Arabic-speaking immigrants to the U.S. from Syria and Lebanon, then still part of the Ottoman Empire, but they were overwhelmingly Christians, hoping to escape both from the Ottoman Turkish rulers and from the Arab Muslims they lived among, both of whom oppressed Christians. There were very few Muslims arriving during this period. From 1878 to 1924, not a single mosque was built in America, evidence of how few Muslims arrived during that period

In fact, the first mosque in America was not built until 1929, in Ross, North Dakota. It was a one-room cement structure that could not have held more than twenty worshippers. The next mosque to be built, known as the Mother Mosque of America, was in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1934. By 1940 there were no more than a dozen tiny mosques scattered around America.

At the same time, the Great Migration of blacks to the North helped encourage the African-American Islam revival and the growth of the African-American Muslim Nationalist Movement that still exists to this day. The hope remains to restore the culture and faith that was destroyed during the era of slavery.

The description here is of members not of Islam, but of the Nation of Islam, founded by Wallace Fard (succeeded by Elijah Muhammad) in 1930, a group whose goal was to improve the spiritual, mental, social, and economic condition of African Americans in the United States. This "Nation of Islam" had nothing to do with the universalist claims of Islam; it was this unorthodox group that about 10,000 African-Americans in Detroit joined in the 1930s. It is incorrect to describe this as a "revival" of "African-American Islam." The Nation of Islam was entirely new; it was not a "revival" of orthodox Islam; its central creed was Black Supremacy; it did not admit whites. Here is Elijah Muhammad's creed: "The Blackman is the Original Man. From him came all brown, yellow, red, and white people. By using a special method of birth-control law, the Blackman was able to produce the white race. This method of birth control was developed by a Black scientist known as Yakub, who envisioned making and teaching a nation of people who would be diametrically opposed to the Original People. A Race of people who would one day rule the Original People and the earth for a period of 6,000 years. Yakub promised his followers that he would graft a nation from his own people, and he would teach them how to rule his people through a system of tricks and lies whereby they use deceit to divide and conquer, and break the unity of the darker people, put one brother against another, and then act as mediators and rule both sides."

This has nothing to do with orthodox Islam. And at no time did the Nation of Islam membership exceed 50,000; it is now believed to have about 20,000 members; it gets more attention

than its numbers warrant because of the antisemitic rants of its cretinous leader, Louis Farrakhan.

During the 1930s and 40s, Arab immigrants began to establish communities and build mosques. African-American Muslims had already built their own mosques, and by 1952 there was [sic] more than 1,000 in North America.

There were no more than a dozen mosques by 1940 in the U.S. The "African-American mosques" referred to are Nation of Islam mosques, not the mosques of orthodox Islam. In the 1930s almost no Arabs arrived in the U.S. because the Immigration Act of 1924 was still in force. According to that act, immigration of any particular group was tied to a national origins quota. The quota provided immigration visas to two percent of the total number of people of each nationality in the United States as of the 1890 national census. That meant a minuscule number of Muslim Arabs would have been admitted.

Furthermore, very few Muslim Arabs wanted to come to the U.S. during the 1930s, that decade of the Depression and mass unemployment. Nor did any arrive during World War II. After the war, when the sea lanes again were open to passenger vessels, most of the few Arabs who arrived were Lebanese and Syrian Christians, prudently leaving the lands where they felt the pressure of growing populations of Muslims. Only a very few of the "more than 1,000" mosques in North America by 1952 were Muslim mosques; at least 900 of them were the street mosques of the Nation of Islam. These should not be used as evidence of a large Muslim population.

After 30 years of excluding most immigrants, the United States flung open its doors again in 1952 and an entirely new group of Muslims came from places such as Palestine (many had come in 1948 after the establishment of Israel), Iraq, and Egypt. The 1960s saw waves of South-east Asian Muslims also making their way to America. Muslims also came from Africa,

Asia and even Latin America.

Over the years, the nation [sic] gained public prominence due to famous members like Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali. Today, there are more than 1500 Islamic centers and mosques around the country.

There is nomenclatorial confusion here: The “nation” that is mentioned appears to be the Nation of Islam, which is a black-power movement that calls itself the Nation of Islam but mainstream Muslims do not regard it as such, particularly as membership is limited to African-Americans, and its leader, Louis Farrakhan, has replaced the cult of Muhammad with his own cult of personality. Malcolm X began as a member of the Nation of Islam, who later left the Nation to become an orthodox Sunni Muslim, and was assassinated for his “treason” by a member of the Nation of Islam. Islam and the Nation of Islam are rivals and bitter – even at times murderous – enemies.

Figures vary, but experts estimate that between four and seven million Americans are Muslim.

Islam is expected to soon be the second largest religion in America. Since the attacks of 9/11, prejudice against Muslims has risen sharply.

Yes, “figures vary” but Muslims consistently overestimate their own numbers, in order to increase their perceived strength and influence. The Pew Research Center and similar groups with no axe to grind estimate the number of Muslims in 2020 as four million; it is Muslims who supply the inflated figure of seven million, without ever presenting the source for their claim. In much the same vein, Muslims talk about becoming the “second largest religion” in America either “soon” or “very soon”; the PBS series uncritically repeats this claim. No non-Muslim research group has ever suggested

that Islam will become the second largest religion before 2040. Again, this is an attempt by Muslims to push a narrative that will increase their political, as well as other forms of, power.

Many Muslims have responded by becoming more active in the American political process, striving to educate their neighbors about their religion and history.

Yes, we have become very familiar with the smooth apologetics for Islam presented at all those events – the Interfaith Outreach why-can't-we-all-get-along meetings, the Open-Mosque Nights, the Ask-A-Muslim-Anything town halls and campus performances, where plausible smiling deeply sincere apologists present Islam to innocent Infidels who, completely ignorant of the faith, and eager to believe that which causes them the least anxiety, are led by the nose. “War is deceit,” said Muhammad, and these propagandists are past masters of Taqiyya, the religiously-sanctioned dissimulation to protect from criticism both the faith of Islam, and the Believers themselves.

These propagandists for Islam are “striving to educate their neighbors” by presenting a sanitized version of Islam. You will not learn, from this suave practiced army of defenders of the faith, that the Qur’an tells Muslims that they are the “best of peoples” and non-Muslims “the most vile of created beings.” You will not learn that Muslims are instructed not to take Christians or Jews as friends, “for they are friends only with each other.” You won’t learn a single one of the more than 100 Qur’anic verses that command Muslims to take part in violent Jihad, to “fight” and to “kill” and to “smite at the necks of” and to “strike terror in the hearts of” the Infidels. None of that will be mentioned. Nor will the trusting audiences of Infidels be told any of the unsavory details in the life of Muhammad, whom Muslims regard as the Perfect Man (al-insan al-kamil) and Model of Conduct (uswa

hasana). They will not be told about Muhammad's consummation of his marriage – that is, his having sexual intercourse with –little Aisha when she was nine years old. Nor will they learn about Muhammad's evident pleasure on learning of the murders by his loyal followers of three people – Asma bint Marwan, Abu 'Afak, Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf – who had mocked him. They will not learn that Muhammad declared in two famous hadith that “war is deceit” and “I have been made victorious through terror.”

But what will certainly be mentioned are the two favorite verses of the apologists. The first is Qur'an 2:256 – “There is no compulsion in religion.” The Infidel audience will not be informed that this verse has been abrogated by later Qur'anic verses. What happens to those who leave the faith shows how irrelevant 2:256 is to the practice of Islam. Muslims who dare to leave Islam can be severely punished, and in some countries they still are executed as apostates. Fear of death surely constitutes “compulsion.”

And what about non-Muslims? Qur'an 2:256 sounds straightforward, and non-Muslims at an Ask-A-Muslim-Anything or Open-Mosque event will almost certainly take it at face value. But a moment's thought about the matter will lead to quite a different conclusion. Non-Muslims are not strictly “compelled” – this is the Muslim view – to give up their religions and convert to Islam. They have three “choices” – to convert to Islam, to be killed, or to live as dhimmis under Muslim rule. As dhimmis, they must pay the Jizyah (a capitation tax on non-Muslims) to the Muslim state, and will also be subject to a host of lesser disabilities: displaying identifying marks on both their dress and dwelling; riding donkeys rather than horses; stepping aside on footpaths so as always to yield the right of way to Muslims. Isn't this seeming “choice” really a form of “compulsion”? In order to avoid either death, or being forced to pay the Jizyah and observe other requirements made on dhimmis, all of which are daily reminders of their well-deserved humiliation, the only

way out was to convert to Islam. While some Christians and Jews paid the Jizyah, others, over time, in order to free themselves of this onerous tax, converted to Islam. Any fair-minded person would describe that as “compulsion.”

The second favorite Qur’anic verse of the apologists is the carefully abridged version of 5:32 that says “If any one slew a person... it would be as if he slew a whole people; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of a whole people...” “See – we Muslims are against killing.” But the full verse actually reads quite differently: “if any one slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.” In other words, 5:32 is not against killing. It sets out the reasons when killing is justified – “for murder or for spreading mischief (fitna) in the land.” “Spreading mischief in the land” has been taken by Islamic scholars to mean among other things, “encouraging disbelief.” So 5:32 gives license to kill the Unbelievers. And the verse that immediately follows, 5:33, provides a description of the ways to inflict that punishment. How many, in that audience of Infidels hoping to learn about Islam, will check up on the actual wording of 5:32, and how many are likely to uncritically take the version offered by their plausible Muslim explicator?

“Many Muslims have responded by becoming more active in the American political process, striving to educate their neighbors about their religion and history.” Yes, they have been very busy, “active in the American political process” (such as Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib), “striving to educate their neighbors” in a sanitized, taqiyya-infused version of Islam that leaves out the violent essence of the faith: Islamic supremacism, and the duty to wage Jihad against Unbelievers until Islam everywhere dominates, and Muslims rule, everywhere.

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