

Yahya Hendi, Or, Interfaith Healing with a Georgetown Imam

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The story is [here](#):

Frederick [Maryland] Interfaith representatives are hoping a set of classes will help shine a positive light on Islam and the Muslim community.

Of course. The Interfaithers of Frederick, Maryland are not in the business of dispassionately studying the texts and teachings of Islam, but rather of “shining a positive light” on Islam and Muslims. Only an “islamophobe” or “racist” could find that worrisome.

Yahya Hendi, a Muslim imam and chaplain at Georgetown University, is leading a four-class series called "Learning About Islam." The first class is set for Oct. 30 at Frederick Community College, with the remaining three set for other times throughout this year and next. The class is free, but contributions are welcome.

Todd Fineberg, a member of Frederick Interfaith, is part of what he called an "unofficial committee to improve relations with the Muslim community." The committee includes Fineberg, who is Jewish; Asma Cheema, a Muslim; and Joey Hoffman, a Christian scientist.

"The three of us are working together to bring about the education program," Fineburg said.

He added that the group hopes the classes will "improve understanding and knowledge and better relations.

Will these interfaithers be discussing the contents of the Qur'an and Hadith that are most disturbing, and most in need of examination, or will they, rather, be guided by Yahya Hendi to look only at those Qur'anic verses that he has selected, as is so often the case in these interfaith affairs where Muslims are in charge? We know the answer to that. I suspect that neither Fineburg nor Hoffman, nor the non-Muslims attending Hendi's talks, will know about any of the more than one hundred Qur'anic verses that command Muslims to engage in violent Jihad. And Yahya Hendi is not about to bring them up.

What will they learn? These interfaith events inevitably follow the same script. First, Hendi will tell these trusting Infidels all about the Five Pillars of Islam: the Shehada (the Profession of Faith), Salat (the five daily prayers), Zakat (the obligatory charitable giving to other Muslims), Sawm (the fasting at Ramadan), and Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca that is required of all Muslims who can afford it, at least once in their lives). And what fun it is for those Interfaith

Christians and Jews to learn those exotic words: Shehada, Salat, Zakat, Sawm, Hajj. Already you think you are learning something of value. And then you will be told by Hendi that the very word "Islam" means "peace." He'll ask a series of rhetorical questions: "Was Pope Francis wrong when he proclaimed that "authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Quran are opposed to every form of violence"? Was President Bush wrong when he said that "the face of terrorism is not the true face of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace"? Was President Obama wrong when he said that "For more than a thousand years, people have been drawn to Islam's message of peace...Islam is rooted in a commitment to compassion and mercy and justice and charity?" That should impress the doubters.

Yahya Hendi will be sure to tell everyone that Jesus is "a revered prophet in Islam." He won't explain that the divinity of Jesus is denied. He'll mention that one of the books of the Qur'an is named after "Mary" who is also "revered" in Islam but, he will leave out, not as the mother of the Son of God. Then he will bring up, as is de rigueur. In these interfaith events, Qur'an 2:256 – "There is no compulsion in religion." Sounds good, and no one in the audience is likely to know enough to bring up the fact that apostates from Islam can be executed, which clearly constitutes "compulsion in religion." A death penalty is the most convincing of compulsions. 2:256 sounds straightforward, and non-Muslims will be expected to take it at face value. But a little 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 a "choice" – so supposedly no "compulsion" – either 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, in order to prevent attacks on them by the Muslims themselves. They were also subject to a host of lesser disabilities, including: displaying identifying

marks on both their dress an

d 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 conditions imposed on dhimmis, all of which were 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, and all the other conditions, did indeed convert to Islam. Any fair-minded person would describe that as "compulsion."

The other Qur'anic verse always quoted at these interfaith events is Qur'an 5:32, but in a carefully truncated version. Hendi will no doubt offer it as "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, will check up on the actual wording of 5:32, and how many are likely to uncritically take the version offered by the amiable Mr. Hendi?

If 2:256 and 5:32 are the verses Yahya Hendi will surely bring up, there are other verses that just as surely he will avoid. He will not mention Qur'an 4:34, which gives Muslim husbands the right to "beat" their wives if they even suspect them of disobedience. Nor will he mention that in Islam men must "manage the affairs of women" because they are "superior to them in status." He won't discuss polygyny, unless someone brings it up, and then he will offer the usual justification: It was "a way for the many widows, in those days of constant warfare in 7th century Arabia, to not be left alone, but to acquire a husband to protect them and manage their affairs." Few will ask "well, then, why is there a need for polygyny today?" He won't explain that a Muslim husband can get a divorce merely by uttering the triple talaq, while for a woman to obtain a divorce much more is required. He won't mention that a Muslim daughter inherits only half that of a Muslim son. Nor will he explain that a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's, and that the reason for that is given by Muhammad himself in a famous hadith: it is "because of the deficiency of woman's intelligence."

Hendi, who is a former member of Frederick Interfaith, said "the class idea is the sound of freedom."

"The sound of freedom"? His classes will not offer the mental freedom necessary to truly learn about Islam but, rather, will be under his control, that is, the mendacious guidance offered by a well-prepared Defender of the Faith, Yahya Hendi.

"In our society, in America, in our beautiful country, we are

always talking about or discussing what makes America great is diversity," he said.

"Conversations he hopes will happen during "Learning About Islam" will help with better conversations.

"For more of America to be a better America, America needs to know about all of its citizens," Hendi said. "It makes people much better when they talk about one another. We are empowered, we are strengthened as a nation, as a society, as a country, as a human family when we know about one another."

And knowing more about your neighbors and their faith and beliefs means being able "to interact with them more, work with them more and understand them more," he said.

Hendi's belief is that "the more you know, the more you know that you need to know more" when it comes to Islam.

"Because the more you learn about Islam, you are 'wait a minute I didn't know this.' People will discover that they have been shaped by their misunderstandings, by some media outlets that don't convey a true message of Islam or Muslims, so, therefore, people are shaped by ignorance," he said. "And ignorance is our worst enemy. Ignorance is what divides us."

Yes, everything bad you hear about Islam is only a misunderstanding, spread by media outlets – "ignorant" and "islamophobic" – whose effect, Yahya Hendi charges, is to "divide us." It's our "ignorance" of Islam that must be combated. But curiously, so many verses will need to be avoided if our "ignorance" is to be corrected in the right, non-misleading, Muslim-approved way. Such verses as 2:191-194, 3:151, 4:89, 8:12, 8:60, 9:5, 9:29, 47:4, and 98:6 won't be brought up at all, nor will another 100 verses that command violent Jihad. Such verses would only upset and confuse

people, at a time when we all have a duty – that’s what interfaith gatherings are for – to make people more aware of “authentic, peaceful Islam.” Trust Yahya Hendi. He wouldn’t deceive you, would he?

For all the Muslim variation on the Christian theme of bomfogery – “brotherhood of man, fatherhood of God” – Hendi has no intention of letting his attendees know “more about [their Muslim] neighbors and their faith and beliefs.” He will necessarily offer a sanitized version of the faith, stressing the Five Pillars, the complimentary things prominent Westerners (the Pope and assorted Presidents) have said about Islam, and offering, along with 2:256 and 5:32, the handful of milder Qur’anic verses that seem to suggest the possibilities of co-existence but which, his attendees will not realize, have all been abrogated by the later, harsher verses of the Medinan period.

Yahya Hendi has made some large claims about the supposed Muslim presence, and influence, in America since the country’s earliest days. This too is a common interfaith theme; it is Obama’s “Islam has always been part of America’s story.”

One aspect Hendi would like to educate attendees on is American Muslims’ contributions to the U.S.

“Many people do not know that Islam is a uniquely American experience as well. American Muslims have been part of America since its inception,” he said.

That means the Muslim faith goes back further in the shaping of America than many people realize.

No, there is no “uniquely American” version of Islam. Islam everywhere remains based on the same Qur’an and the same Hadith. Muslims obviously have had a different experience in

America than they have had, for example, in France or Sweden, but the Islam taught and practiced in France, Sweden, and America remains the same.

As for the claim that "Muslims have been part of America since its inception," this claim which is now made so frequently by apologists has no basis in fact. In the last few decades, exaggerated claims have been made for the numbers of slaves in America who were Muslims. First came a claim of 5%, then 15%, then 20%, and now we hear that "30% of the slaves were Muslims." There is no evidence supplied for any of these figures: they are simply made up out of whole cloth, or plucked from the air. What we do know is that no slave-trader, no slave-owner, and no slaves themselves, appeared to have noticed any Muslims in their midst, as they surely would have had there been any. Or rather, none were mentioned save for a handful – fewer than ten – whose names are endlessly repeated. The three most noted are Omar ibn Said, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (Job ben Solomon), and Abdul-Rahman ibn Ibrahim Sori. There is evidence, then, that at most one-hundredth of 1% of the slaves, not 30%, may have been Muslims.

We next find Islam as "part of America since its inception" with the building of the first mosque, in 1929, in Ross, North Dakota, a tiny one-room structure that could fit a dozen people. Then, in 1934, the "mother mosque" in America was built in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. These two mosques do not suggest much of a Muslim presence. There was, however, an Arab Christian presence, an emigration that began in 1880 and continued until 1924 (when the immigration laws were changed), consisting of those who fled the Ottoman-ruled lands, chiefly Syria and Lebanon, to escape Muslim oppression. These immigrants formed such Arab neighborhoods as Little Syria in New York, but these communities had nothing to do with Islam. Nonetheless, one finds Muslim propagandists today suggesting that Christian enclaves such as Little Syria were in fact "Muslim," in order to backdate and exaggerate the Muslim

presence in the United States.

“How many people know that Thomas Jefferson read the Quran?,” he [Yahya Hendi] asked.

No one knows if Jefferson read the Qur'an he bought, as he bought thousands of other books, because he was a curious and learned man. Muslims have made much of his owning a Qur'an, suggesting slyly that he must have read the book and admired it. But the evidence is strong that he did not read it, for he habitually left notes on all his reading, and there is nothing he wrote about the Qur'an. Instead, there is evidence that in his dealings with the North African Muslims, he was horrified by their attitude toward non-Muslims. When he and John Adams were negotiating with the envoy from Tripoli, that envoy informed them that “it was written in the Koran, that all Nations who should not have acknowledged their [Muslims'] authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon whoever they could find and to make Slaves of all they could take as prisoners, and that every Mussulman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.” That was enough for Jefferson, and when he became President, he was determined to go to war against the North African Muslims – the Barbary Pirates – in order to suppress their attacks on Christian shipping. He had no admiration for the Muslims; he understood them to be an enemy of the Christians, as the Tripoli envoy said, and in making war on the Barbary Pirates, Jefferson acted on that understanding.

Hendi said he will share historical data that shows how Muslims have shaped what America has become.

I'm eagerly anticipating that “data” – aren't you? How have Muslims “shaped what America has become”? What have been their contributions to the philosophy, politics, art, literature, and music of these United States? Since instrumental music is haram in Islam, how could there have been much of a

contribution to our music? Since the depiction of living creatures is also haram, severely limiting the possibilities for artistic expression, what Muslim contributions can there have been to American art? What about philosophy? There is no philosophic thought for devout Muslims outside of Islam itself, which they believe, if rightly understood, contains all of wisdom. And politics? Islam and the democratic West have very different views. In Islam the legitimacy of any government depends on whether the ruler follows the will of Allah, as expressed in the Qur'an. A ruler may be despotic, as long as he remains a good Muslim. In the United States, as elsewhere in the advanced West, the legitimacy of any government depends on its reflecting, however imperfectly through elections, the will expressed by the people. There is a big difference.

"So our fellow neighbors will know that American Muslims are not newcomers to America that we have shaped the economy, the politics, the policies of the United States of America for the last 220 years," he said.

So those dozen-odd Muslim slaves in America – the only ones known to historians – have magically multiplied to become 5-10-30% of all the slaves in America, that is, have gone from being ten or twelve, to being several million. This mendacious multiplication took place in recent years, prompted first by Muslims, on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, and unopposed by those who did not dare to question them, for fear of being labeled "islamophobes."

For the "last 220 years" – that is, since 1800, Muslims "have shaped the economy, the politics, the policies of the United States of America." What can Yahya Hendi be thinking? Let's try to tease out what it might be. As for the economy, there are no records of Muslims owning any property, working in any factories or on any farms (save for the 1-12 Muslim slaves who are known), inventing new devices, or otherwise contributing

to, much less having “shaped,” the economy. I suspect that what Hendi means is that “slaves contributed to the economy,” and he claims many of the slaves were Muslim, so Muslims must have “contributed to the economy,” which then resulted in a further ludicrous claim that “Muslims shaped the economy.” Read the history books, and see if there is a scintilla of evidence that more than a handful of Muslim slaves existed in America. How could those dozen Muslims – several of whom returned to West Africa, and at least one converted to Christianity – or the handful of their descendants who remained Muslims (despite being without Qur’ans or mosques) – conceivably have “shaped the American economy for the past 220 years”?

How could American Muslims have “shaped the politics” of America for the “last 220 years”? Voting? Running for office? What can Hendi be thinking? Between those 10-12 recorded Muslim slaves, and the first one-room mosque that was built in 1929, why do we not hear anything about Muslims in America? Surely it is because there were next to none here until very recently. There have never been Muslims in elective office, state or Federal, until the last few decades; the first Muslim to be elected to the House was Keith Ellison, in 2002. He had no discernible effect on legislative policies. In 2018, two Muslim females, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, were elected to Congress; they have been noisy, and get a lot of media attention for their controversial views, but in the hard slog of legislation they have done nothing, and have had no effect on government policies. Perhaps Hendi has some “data,” as he calls it, about the “real” Muslim population in the 19th century that has till now has been hidden from view, or has uncovered evidence of Muslim industrialists and entrepreneurs (anything is possible) that he has decided to share with his interfaith audience.

As for the future, it is possible that Muslims, as their numbers increase, will indeed help to “shape” policies –

concerning, for example, the Arab-Israeli conflict. But Muslims, who were hardly discernible in this country until the 1960s, have not “shaped the economy, the politics, the policies” of America for the past 220 years except in one unforgettable and disastrous way. The Muslims who attacked on 9/11 caused an estimated two trillion dollars in economic damage to this country, and also prompted further spending of another six trillion dollars on misguided wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That is unlikely to be something Yahya Hendi will want to discuss. In that sense only have Muslims “shaped” our country.

It will be fascinating to see how Yahya Hendi supports his fantastical remark, that “for the past 220 years, Muslims have shaped the economy, the politics, the policies of the United States of America.” It can’t be done. Of course, he can always lie. “War is deceit,” said the Perfect Man and Model of Conduct. Who is Yahya Hendi not to take Muhammad at his word?

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