

# Muslims and Social Change in the Atlantic Basin\*

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The inhabitants of the Maghrib [North Africa] have it on authority of the books of prediction that the Muslims will . . . make a successful attack against the Christians and conquer the lands of European Christians beyond the sea. This, it is said, will take place by sea.

—Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqadimah*<sup>1</sup>

It seems to me if we must have any Turkish war, we ought to begin with ourselves. In vain we wage carnal wars without, while at home we are conquered by spiritual battles . . . Now that the Roman Curia [Catholic Church] is more tyrannical than any Turk . . . there is no hope of successful war or victory. As far as I can see, God fights against us; first, we must conquer him with tears, pure prayers, holy, and pure faith.

—Martin Luther, *Correspondence*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqadimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, “Luther to George Spalatin” (Wittenberg, December 21, 1518), *Luther’s Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters*, trans. and ed. Preserved Smith (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), vol. 1, no. 106,141.

IN the fall of 1765 a young man visited the printing offices of the *Virginia Gazette* in Williamsburg, Virginia, and purchased George Sale's English-language translation of the central text of the Islamic faith, the Qur'an. The young man hoped that the sacred text and foundation of Islamic law would better help him understand how religious beliefs transfer across cultures. In his eyes, the Stamp Act, imposed by Britain on colonial North Americans without their consent, undermined the heritage of English constitutional law and natural law as specified in the Qur'an and other scriptures. Inspired in part by his reading of the Qur'an, Thomas Jefferson pioneered a conception of human rights that revolutionized the history of the Atlantic world. His intellectual debt to Islam was sufficiently clear that John Quincy Adams, in a 1791 pamphlet responding to Thomas Paine's defense of the French Revolution, compared Jefferson unfavorably to the prophet Muhammad.<sup>3</sup> In the same pamphlet, Adams further sought to discredit Jefferson by imagining that he and his followers chanted a phrase analogous to the Muslim Shahada:<sup>4</sup> "There is but one Goddess of Liberty and Common Sense is her prophet."<sup>5</sup>

Though Atlantic history and Islamic studies have been dynamic fields in recent decades, Muslims' contributions to Atlantic basin societies, Islam's influence on Jefferson and other similar thinkers in the Euro-American tradition, and the links between the Atlantic basin and the Islamic world have received comparatively limited coverage. By and large, Islamic scholars have focused on the "Islamic world," or Dar al-Islam: the belt of Muslim societies from West Africa to the Pacific. There is a similar dearth of coverage in the literature dealing with Atlantic history: the history of the continents that surround the Atlantic Ocean and the peoples contained therein from the fifteenth century until the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Adams made the comparison in a widely distributed pamphlet written under the pseudonym Publicola. The pamphlet was designed to rebut Paine's analysis of the French Revolution contained in his book *Vindication of the Rights of Man*. Americans widely saw the book at the time as an attack on Adams's father, then U.S. vice president John Adams. For more on this incident, see David W. Lesch, *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003), p. 493.

<sup>4</sup> The Shahada is the recitation of the Islamic "witness of faith" and the first of Islam's five pillars: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God." For more on the Shahada, see *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. "Shahadah."

<sup>5</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, "Is It Worse to Follow Mahomet Than the Devil? Early American Uses of Islam," *American Society of Church History* 72, no. 4 (2003): 788. One could say that this was the rhetorical "equivalent" of regularly referring to the 44th president of the United States by his Muslim middle name: "Barack Hussein Obama."

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent overview of recent trends in Atlantic history, see Allison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 741-757.

My article asks two questions that have rarely appeared in Islamic or Atlantic history. First, can we conceptualize Atlantic history as a viable component of Islamic history? Second, do Muslims—either as individuals or as representatives of an intellectual tradition different from that of Christian Europeans—merit inclusion in mainstream histories of all societies in the Atlantic basin? While scholars have long recognized the importance of Islam and Muslims to African and Iberian history, there remains limited scholarship on Muslims in other parts of the Atlantic basin before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Exploring Islam's role in these societies is problematical because mainstream Euro-American conceptions of Islam have long been based largely on misinformation and distortions and because there were few recognizably Muslim communities in the Atlantic basin outside of Africa since 1500. Can we discuss Euro-American views of Islam without, for these purposes, referencing Western bigotry or imperialism? Isn't even misinformation a kind of information? Doesn't it imply some sort of relationship?

I believe that the answer to these questions is yes and that exploring them provides scholars with a series of useful insights into Atlantic history and Islamic history. In particular, I argue that answering these questions allows us to see that the inheritance of the United States and other nations of the Atlantic basin extends beyond the confines of Europe to the Islamic world. African Muslims were important members of communities in North and West Africa as well as the global Islamic community whose members and intellectual tradition left an important but often overlooked imprint on Europeans and those of their descendants in the Americas. That imprint provided a tableau for them not only to redefine their relationship with the Islamic world, but also, more importantly, to define their own national identity and relationship to other nations in the Euro-Atlantic family. Within this framework, Islamic ideas and power functioned as an engine of social change and helped to justify universal religious and political rights.

In this article I will explore how this process occurred in three crucial turning points in Atlantic history from the fifteenth century until the eighteenth century: the Reformation, the rise of European nationalism, and the emergence of Anglo-American notions of natural law and universal human rights. Throughout these three periods, the reality of Muslim military power shaped religious, literary, and political discourse in Euro-Atlantic societies and won widespread respect of Muslims and their civilization. Intellectuals as diverse as Martin Luther, John Locke, and Thomas Jefferson expended considerable energy educating themselves and others about Islam. They also employed Islam and Muslims as a vehicle to justify reforms within their own societies. In fact, these

men's use of Islam was sufficiently clear that their opponents—from Catholic theologians to Federalist Americans—sought to discredit Luther, Jefferson, and others by arguing that they were really promoting Islamic ideas. Ultimately, an analysis of these types of debates allows us to better place Muslims and their religion in the history of Atlantic societies and ultimately in contemporary America.

#### LUTHER AND THE REFORMATION

Throughout the six centuries preceding Columbus's voyage in 1492 to the Americas, Islamic culture dominated the Mediterranean world and parts of Asia and Africa. While Mongol and Crusader invasions and the Reconquista had tested Islamic power, no European state equaled the strength of the major early modern Muslim empires, particularly the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman armies had seized Constantinople, the ancient center of Eastern Christianity, in 1453 after they had taken much of the rest of southeastern Europe in the fourteenth century. Thereafter they expanded into the Balkans and Central Europe, gaining control of Hungary in 1526 and besieging Vienna in 1529.

For many Christian Europeans, Islamic expansion and the fall of Constantinople signaled God's displeasure with Christendom and the Roman Catholic Church. Among the first to make these arguments was the fourteenth-century Oxford scholar John Wycliffe. He contended that Islam's success was linked to the growth of greed, pride, violence, materialism, and the lust for power within the European Christian church. In *De Christo et Suo Adversario* (On Christ and His Adversary), Wycliffe states that the defining characteristics of Islam are identical to those of Western Christianity. He highlights these observations by referring to himself and the other European Western Christians by the sarcastic and rhetorical phrase "We Western Mahomets."<sup>7</sup> He also berates Europeans' arrogance: "we think the whole world will be regulated by our judgments and tremble before our command."<sup>8</sup> According to Wycliffe, this attitude, the "Islamic spirit," would grow in Europe and in the Islamic world until European Christians returned to the real spirit of the gospels and Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Celia M. Lewis, "History, Mission, and Crusade in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Chaucer Review* 42, no. 4 (2008): 373.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: Biography of a Prophet* (San Francisco: HarperCollins San Francisco, 1993), pp. 32–33.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Wycliffe's arguments attained an unprecedented place in European life during the century after his death in 1384 because of the intersection of three factors. First, the Ottomans seized Constantinople in 1453 and formally absorbed Hungary into their empire in 1543. For the first time since the Barbarian invasions of a thousand years earlier, one of Europe's major states had fallen under external control. A powerful Muslim state was now effectively a member of the continent's balance of power and able to influence the continent's political affairs. Second, the printing press allowed for rapid dissemination of information, especially pamphlets, travel reports on foreign lands, and what would become newspapers. News on the Ottoman Empire, its peoples, and its religious traditions dominated these publications. The first known occurrence in print of the German word for newspaper (*zeitung*)—the 1502 "Neue zeitung von orient und auff gange"—discussed Venice's losses to the Ottomans in 1501 and 1502.<sup>10</sup> Further, mass-produced woodcuts depicting Ottoman auxiliaries enslaving Germans generated widespread public outrage in Protestant and Catholic Germany against Muslims.<sup>11</sup>

Third, a German monk, Martin Luther, sent ninety-five theses criticizing various aspects of the Catholic Church to Archbishop Albert of Mainz in 1517. That action began the Reformation, an event that reshaped European politics and influenced societies throughout the Atlantic world. From the start, Islam and the success of the Ottoman Empire framed Luther's worldview and were integral to his call for both social action and reform of the Catholic Church. In Luther's eyes, it was imperative for Europeans to understand Islam so they could understand that the Ottoman Empire was not only a military threat but

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, "Lutheranism and the Turkish Peril," in *Europe and the Levant in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, by Kenneth M. Setton (London: Variorum Reprints, 1974), p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> For more on these issues, see Konstantin Mihailović's *Memoirs of a Janissary*. In particular, look at the two sixteenth-century woodcuts on pages 174 and 175. The first one is of Turkish raiders with German peasant captives. The second is from 1502 and discusses Germans being transformed into Janissaries. Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, trans. Benjamin Stolz (Ann Arbor: Joint Committee on Eastern Europe, American Council of Learned Societies, the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1975), pp. 174–175; Benedikt Kuripešić, *Itinerarium: der Gesandtschaft König Ferdinand I. von Ungarn nach Konstantinopel 1530*, ed. and translit. Srećko Džaja and Jozo Džambo (Bochum, Germany: Studienverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1983); and David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 78.

also indicative of deep spiritual problems in Europe and the Catholic Church—problems so heinous as to merit God's wrath.

In a series of widely circulated pamphlets, Luther tied the corruption of the Catholic Church to the success of Muslims (whom he inaccurately called "Turks").<sup>12</sup> Luther saw the "Turks" as the instruments of God's wrath against sinning Christians—a "schoolmaster" to discipline and teach the Christians of Europe to fear God in much the same way that the Babylonians had "schooled" Israel.<sup>13</sup> One can find this view as early as his 1518 defense of his ninety-five theses, in which he asserts: "To fight against the Turks is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod."<sup>14</sup> Luther later wrote that Christian Europeans had "earned God's wrath and disfavor, so that He justly gives us into the hands of the devil and the Turk."<sup>15</sup>

As great as the Ottoman military threat was, Luther asserted it was necessary for Europeans to cleanse their souls first before going to war against the "Turks" or anyone else. In a 1518 letter to George Burkhardt (George Spalatin), secretary and chaplain of the elector John Frederick, Luther remarked:

If I rightly understand you, you ask whether an expedition against the Turks can be defended and commanded by me on biblical grounds. Even supposing the war should be undertaken for pious reasons rather than for gain, I confess that I cannot promise what you ask, but rather the opposite . . . It seems to me if we must have any Turkish war, we ought to begin with ourselves. In vain we wage carnal wars without, while at home we are conquered by spiritual battles . . . Now that the Roman Curia [Catholic Church] is more tyrannical than any Turk . . . there is no hope of successful war or victory. As far as I can see, God fights against us; first, we must conquer him with tears, pure prayers, holy, and pure faith.<sup>16</sup>

Equally important, Christian Europeans could not expect to be absolved of their sins in battle—even in a war sanctioned by the Catholic Church—since it had falsely promised that Christianity accepted

<sup>12</sup> Luther's inaccurate reference to Muslims as "Turks" was a common European conflation of the two groups at the time. One sees a similar conflation in the work of Luther's famous Dutch contemporary, the humanist and Christian theologian Desiderius Erasmus.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Henrich and James L. Boyce, "Martin Luther—Translations of Two Prefaces on Islam: Preface to the *Libellus de Ritu et Moribus Turcorum* (1530), and Preface to Bibliander's Edition of the *Qur'ān* (1543)," *Word & World* 16, no. 2 (1996): 255.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Luther, *Luther's Correspondence*, p. 141.

martyrdom and crusades. "If anyone else wants to go to war in another way," Luther wrote in 1529, "let them take their chances."<sup>17</sup>

As Luther criticized the Catholic Church, he simultaneously pioneered a new European conception of Islam within an eschatological framework that reinforced his pastoral mission. While Edward Said correctly identifies similarities between Latin medieval theologians and Luther, it is important to bear in mind that Luther lived in a time and sociocultural context far removed from those theologians.<sup>18</sup> For average Christian Europeans in the sixteenth century, who lived in a world in which Islam appeared ascendant and to hold God's favor, it was not enough to rehash old assertions that Islam was a Christian heresy.

Luther responded to these fears by asserting that the "Turks" were the agents of the Devil who, along with the Antichrist located in the heart of the Catholic Church, Rome, would usher in the Last Days and the Apocalypse.<sup>19</sup> In this environment, Luther warned that the chief danger for Christians would be that they would be fooled by the Devil's agents and convert to Islam en masse: "Since we now have the Turk and his religion at our very doorstep, our people must be warned lest, either moved by the splendor of the Turkish religion and the external appearance of their customs, or offended by the meager display of our faith or the deformity of our customs, they deny their Christ and follow Muhammad."<sup>20</sup> Among those vulnerable to the "splendor of the Turkish religion" or to the powers of the Devil was Luther himself. In a section of his *Selected Psalms* he describes how close he had come to succumbing to the temptations of the Devil:

Whoever is interested may earn a lesson from my example, which I shall now confess. A few times—when I did not bear this principal teaching in mind—the Devil caught up with me and plagued me with Scripture passages until heaven and earth became too small for me.

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<sup>17</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Erasmus Reader*, ed. Erika Rummel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 315.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), pp. 61–73. For more on Luther's debt to medieval Christian scholars' concepts of Islam, see David Choi, "Martin Luther's Response to the Turkish Threat: Continuity and Contrast with the Medieval Commentators Riccolda Da Monte Croce and Nicholas of Cusa" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Luther provided specific instructions to his followers as to how they should behave were they to be captured and enslaved by Ottoman/Muslim armies. While he counseled his followers not to fight other Christians (even if that meant death), he advised Christian women to accept sexual submission to Muslim men if necessary. Egil Grislis, "Luther and the Turks, Part I & II," *Muslim World* 64 (1974): 278.

<sup>20</sup> Henrich and Boyce, "Martin Luther," p. 260.

Then all the words and laws of man were right, and not an error was to be found in the whole papacy. In short, the only one who had ever erred was Luther. All my best works, teachings, sermons, and books had to be condemned. The abominable Muhammad almost became my prophet, and both Turks and Jews were on the way to pure sainthood.

Therefore, dear brother, be not proud or sure and certain that you know Christ well. You hear what I confess to you, admitting what the Devil was able to do against Luther, who is supposed to be a doctor in this art, who has preached, composed, written, said, sung, and read so much in these matters. So take my advice, and do not celebrate too soon. Watch out that your skill does not desert you. Be concerned, be humble, and pray that you may grow in this art and be protected against the crafty Devil.<sup>21</sup>

It is important that Luther's concerns with Islam were not grounded solely in the "craftiness" of the Devil or the "Turks." As he clearly indicates, they also reflected his belief that Europe's Catholic theologians were too intellectually and spiritually weak to protect ordinary Europeans from the allure of the Devil and conversion to Islam. In his introduction to the *Tract on the Religion and Customs of the Turks*, he asserts that Catholic theologians would convert to Islam if they "spent three days among the Turks."<sup>22</sup> Luther supported these accusations by publicizing texts on Islam, including the Qur'an, and the works of Europeans who had visited Muslim territories. This was an unusual step anywhere in sixteenth-century Europe, where Protestant and Catholic communities banned texts dealing with Islam as a threat to Christianity.<sup>23</sup> In 1542, Luther had to use considerable political pressure before the city council of Basel lifted its ban on publishing Luther's preferred Latin translation of the Qur'an.<sup>24</sup>

Nor did Luther's interest in Islam go unnoticed by his adversaries in the Catholic Church, which, in the words of the papal nuncio Francesco Chierigati, believed Luther was a "greater evil to Christendom

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<sup>21</sup> Minou Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe* (Reading, UK: Garnet, 2000), pp. 119–135; and Franco Cardini, *Europe and Islam*, trans. Caroline Beamish (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 147–150.

<sup>22</sup> Henrich and Boyce, "Martin Luther," p. 259.

<sup>23</sup> Many of the texts on Islam that Luther promoted were on the Catholic Church's official list of banned publications, the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. Susan R. Boettcher, "German Orientalism in the Age of Confessional Consolidation: Jacob Andrea's *Thirteen Sermons on the Turk*, 1568," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 103.

<sup>24</sup> Henrich and Boyce, "Martin Luther," p. 255. Zürich threatened to suppress the same translation of the Qur'an as well.



than the Turk.”<sup>25</sup> Throughout the first half of the sixteenth century, various Catholic thinkers sought to prove that there were close similarities between Lutheranism and Islam in areas as diverse as freedom of worship to celibacy of priests. One Catholic writer, Johannes Cochlaeus, accused Luther of preferring Turkish rule to that of the Catholic Church, praising the Qur’an, and seeking to confuse European Christians about the true nature of the Ottoman threat.<sup>26</sup> Other writers stressed that the Ottoman sultan in the first half of the sixteenth century, Suleyman the Magnificent, saw Luther as a valuable ally to the empire’s cause. While Catholic criticisms often attributed views to Luther he did not hold, he nonetheless believed it necessary to publicly beseech God “to preserve him” from living under Suleyman’s rule.<sup>27</sup>

In light of these criticisms, why did Luther and his contemporaries, who were already challenging the legitimacy of the chief religious institution in Europe, the Catholic Church, invest time and resources in promoting knowledge about Islam, Christendom’s chief enemy during his lifetime? The answer is that demonstrating Islam’s strength and superiority over Roman Catholicism was central to the key tenets of Luther’s views: the Catholic Church was not fit to lead Christendom, and the success of the “Turks” was God’s way of articulating His desire for Europeans to repent and to reform. For Luther, understanding Islam offered the surest path for Christian Europeans to see the veracity of his contention regarding the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the Catholic Church’s leaders and the urgent need to find new leadership.<sup>28</sup>

## THE EMERGENCE OF EUROPEAN NATIONALISM

Ottoman power also drove important political change in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, contributing to the rise of nation-states and new national identities in two key ways. First, the

<sup>25</sup> Setton, “Lutheranism and the Turkish Peril,” p. 147.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158–159.

<sup>27</sup> “When Luther was informed of the sultan’s [Suleyman the Magnificent] tender regard for him, he crossed himself and besought God ‘to preserve him from this gracious lord.’” *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that Luther was not the only Protestant leader to discuss Islam in the sixteenth century. Luther’s contemporary and intellectual companion, Philip Melancthon, wrote Duke Johann Ernst of Saxony in 1537 “it is of the very greatest importance for our princes to get a thorough acquaintance with Turkish affairs.” *Ibid.*, p. 162. John Calvin also discussed Islam, as did Jacob Andrea. For more on Andrea’s sermons on Islam, see Boettcher, “German Orientalism,” pp. 105–110.

Ottoman Empire's presence in European politics allowed leaders from England to the Balkans to use alliances with Istanbul to counter the policies of larger and more powerful Christian European rivals. Second, Muslim mariners attacked European coastal areas and seized more than a million Europeans. These attacks decimated coastal regions, undermined the authority of some governments, redefined national identities, and compelled some governments to extend unprecedented rights and guarantees to their subjects—rights that became cornerstones of the Euro-Atlantic legal tradition today.

One saw this two-track process unfold across Europe from the sixteenth century until the mid eighteenth century. While one might question Stephen Fischer-Galati's contention that the Ottoman threat guaranteed the survival of the Protestant Reformation,<sup>29</sup> there is no doubt that the simultaneous challenges of the Ottoman Empire and of the Protestant Reformation taxed the resources and complicated the strategic calculations of Catholic leaders. On multiple occasions—including periods when Ottoman armies appeared to threaten Europe—Protestant states in Germany refused to contribute soldiers to participate in military operations against the Ottoman armies<sup>30</sup> or discuss funding wars against the Ottomans with Catholic Habsburg officials before all internal religious issues had been resolved.<sup>31</sup> For all of their power and wealth, Catholic leaders—Charles V of Spain and Ferdinand I of Austria—had little choice but to negotiate directly with smaller German states and respect their religious views, no matter how objectionable they appeared to be to Catholic audiences. This was a major blow to states that saw themselves as absolute monarchies beholden to no one except God.

Nor were Catholic resources stretched only in Germany. In its many protracted conflicts with the Netherlands, France, and England, Spain always had to allow for the fact of military alliances with the Ottoman Empire, which could strike Spanish possessions far removed from Western Europe. Dutch Calvinists used Ottoman markets to cir-

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen A. Fischer-Galati, *Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism, 1521–1555* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 117.

<sup>30</sup> For instance, in 1532 a well-equipped army of Germans, including many Protestants, assembled at Vienna and refused to pursue a retreating and much smaller Ottoman force beyond the Habsburg imperial frontiers because their governments had made no commitment to offensive military operations. For more on this incident, see John W. Bohnstedt, "The Infidel Scourge of God: The Turkish Menaces as Seen by German Pamphleteers of the Reformation Era," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 58, no. 9 (1968): 7.

<sup>31</sup> Of course Ferdinand or Charles could avoid the headache of seeking Protestant support and buy peace with the Ottoman Empire. But, as Ferdinand found out in 1562, peace carried a steep price too: 30,000 ducats annually and the renunciation of territorial claims in the Balkans. Boettcher, "German Orientalism," p. 102.

cumvent a Spanish embargo on Dutch trade with Iberia—an embargo meant to punish Holland for seeking independence from the Spanish crown. Thanks in part to Ottoman markets and military assistance, the Dutch won their independence in 1609. Protestant England and Catholic France also used Ottoman power as a vehicle to assert their national identity and interests against Spain's power in Europe.<sup>32</sup> In one instance, Spain was compelled to release France's king, Francis I, shortly after Spanish armies seized him and defeated the French army at Pavia in 1525: the Ottoman Empire had signaled its desire for the immediate release of the French king. Subsequently, Francis admitted to a Venetian diplomat that he saw the Ottoman Empire as the only force capable of "guaranteeing the combined existence of the states of Europe" against Spanish power.<sup>33</sup>

Importantly, the Ottoman ability to strike at Spanish possessions far removed from Eastern Europe reflected its large army and formidable formal and informal naval power. Fulfilling the prediction of the fourteenth-century Arab historian Ibn Khaldun that North African mariners would "attack the Christians and conquer the lands of the European Christians,"<sup>34</sup> Moroccans, Tunisians, and Algerians seized Christians and wreaked havoc on Europe's maritime commerce and coastal communities from the eastern Mediterranean Sea to Iceland. Cornwall, Devon, and other English communities lost a fifth of their shipping and thousands of sailors in the first third of the seventeenth century alone.<sup>35</sup> Yet, the impact of Muslim mariners on Italy was far greater. Robert David notes in *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, that large stretches of Italy's once populous coastline were uninhabit-

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<sup>32</sup> In the 1580s, Queen Elizabeth secured profitable trading privileges for English merchants from the Ottoman Empire that had been previously reserved only for Frenchmen. She won these privileges by stressing to Ottoman officials common English and Ottoman religious practices—strict iconoclasm and vigorous monotheism—and ideological hostility to Catholic Habsburg power. Elizabeth was so successful that Ottoman officials believed that the English were on the verge of converting to Islam in the late 1580s; all they had to do was recite the confessions of faith. For more on Anglo-Ottoman diplomacy during the sixteenth century, see Bernadette Andrea, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 20–24.

<sup>33</sup> Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1977), pp. 174, 183–185.

<sup>34</sup> Khaldun, *The Muqadimah*, p. 213. The following is the full quotation: "The rank (of admiral) has been preserved to this day in the dynasties of the Maghrib [North Africa]. There, the identity (of the admiralty is still preserved), and how to take care of a fleet, how to build ships and navigate them, is known. Perhaps some political opportunity will arise in the coastal countries, and the Muslims will ask the wind to blow against unbelief and unbelievers. The inhabitants of the Maghrib have it on authority of the books of prediction that the Muslims will yet have to make a successful attack against the Christians and conquer the lands of European Christians beyond the sea. This, it is said, will take place by sea."

<sup>35</sup> Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 49.

able—"continually infested with Turks" throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Fishing and farming (even ten to twenty miles inland) remained dangerous pursuits well into the eighteenth century along much of the Italian coast, especially in Sicily and other areas close to North Africa.<sup>36</sup>

Among the many seized Christian residents of Europe and other regions of the Atlantic world<sup>37</sup> was the Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes. He was a leading figure in Spain's cultural flourishing in the sixteenth century, the Siglo de Oro ("Golden Century"), and an architect of Spain's then emerging national identity. As a Spanish soldier he was captured in 1575 while on a boat in the Mediterranean with his brother. He spent five years as a slave in the North African city of Algiers until a friar from the Trinitarian Catholic order eventually won his release. Cervantes's time in captivity was a seminal period in his life and literary development. In the words of leading Cervantes expert Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce, the captivity is the "hinge" that "forcefully organizes" Cervantes's entire literary life.<sup>38</sup> The late Spanish historian Américo Castro and the Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo have similarly identified Cervantes's captivity in Algiers as the central experience of his life and a decisive moment in his formation as a writer.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, one cannot truly understand the meaning of Cervantes's work without coming to terms with his experience in Arab-Muslim culture in North Africa.

One need not look further than *Don Quixote*, his most well-known work and an important novel in the Western literary canon, to see the importance of captivity for Cervantes. In "The Captive's Tale," the chief character is a Spanish soldier who, like Cervantes, is captured at sea and spends years enslaved in the Baño, a prison in Algiers. Throughout the tale, he discusses his despair at his fate, his desire to win his freedom at any cost, and negative and positive relationships with male and female Muslims. The captive's escape—an experience that he asserts is without comparison on Earth—is made possible by the generosity of several Muslim friends, including a young female convert to Christianity. Upon returning to Spain, the captive and his companions receive an enthusiastic welcome from the whole population of the

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslims Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 139–140.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, 11 of the 390 English prisoners ransomed in Algiers in 1680 were from New England and New York. Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Antonia Garcés, *A Captive's Tale: Cervantes in Algiers* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

city of Vélez Málaga. Cervantes notes that the return of a freed Christian was an important but still regular aspect of daily life on Spain's coast: Vélez Málaga's inhabitants "weren't surprised to see freed prisoners" for "everyone who lived on that coast had long since seen" them.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Cervantes links "The Captive's Tale" to the Atlantic and wider Islamic worlds: the captive and others in the story had spent time in the Ottoman capital, Istanbul, and the captive's brother traveled to the Americas to seek his fortune.<sup>41</sup>

Although *Don Quixote* is a fictional story, Cervantes's depiction of the return of freed European captives is historically accurate. Freed Europeans as important as Cervantes or simply ordinary individuals often participated in public parades after they returned to Europe. These events were meant to symbolize their reintegration into European society and to win more funds for the Trinitarians and other organizations dedicated to freeing European captives. In some nations the parades were enormous spectacles, as "former slaves wore their chains and tattered clothing."<sup>42</sup>

Equally important, European captives, Muslim attacks, and the publicity tied to them sparked new national consciousnesses, national missions, and ultimately social change in England and later France.<sup>43</sup> In both, this process cemented the principle that only non-Europeans should be enslaved, and as such they glorified "free" labor and efforts to combat Muslim slavery. One can see this mission as early as Shakespeare's depiction of a defining moment in British history: Henry V's victory over the French and his marriage proposal to Princess Katherine, the daughter of the king of France. Henry tries to win Katherine's heart by promising her that their future son will liberate Constantinople from the Ottomans:<sup>44</sup> "If ever thou beest mine, Kate, as I have a saving faith within me tells me thou shalt, I get thee with scrambling, and thou must therefore needs prove a good soldier-breeder. Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the

<sup>40</sup> Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, vol. 1, chap. 41.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, chap. 39. It is worth noting that Cervantes weaves Cid Hamete Benengeli, a fictional Arab historian, into various parts of *Don Quixote* as a narrator and character. Cervantes even implies that Benengeli is the real author of the story and that it was originally written in Arabic. For more on the Spanish author's use of Benengeli, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, chap. 9 and Howard Mancing, *Cervantes' Don Quixote: A Reference Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), pp. 41–42, 109–115, 120–122, and 147.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, p. 78.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Hudson, "Britons Never Will Be Slaves': National Myth, Conservatism, and the Beginnings of British Antislavery," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 4 (2001): 564.

<sup>44</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry V.*, ed. A. R. Humphreys (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 5:2.201–209. References are to act, scene, and line.

Turk by the beard? Shall we not? What say'st thou, my fair flower-de-luce?" Yet it is unlikely that the real Henry made such a promise to Katherine since Constantinople did not fall to the Ottoman Empire until 1453—three decades after Henry proposed to Katherine in 1420. Nonetheless, the story or "myth" of Henry's promise to Katherine was sufficiently central in English national consciousness and identity by the sixteenth century that Shakespeare felt compelled to use it in his play on Henry's life regardless of its historical validity.<sup>45</sup> Literary masterpieces, such as *Henry V*, bear testimony to the need of the English—even at the most intense period of nationalism—to define themselves in relation to the Muslim world.<sup>46</sup>

The Islamic element of English national consciousness evidenced in *Henry V* grew still stronger in the seventeenth century, as Muslim maritime attacks challenged the cornerstone of the island nation's national mythology: the ocean was the source of English economic, military, and political vitality. As Linda Colley observes in *Captives*, the Stuart kings' failure to stop Muslim attacks and enslavement of Englishmen was an important factor that robbed them of legitimacy and helped "to provoke the civil wars that tore England and its adjacent countries apart after 1642."<sup>47</sup> Subsequent governments sought to avoid the Stuarts' fate by strengthening the English navy, paying Muslim mariners not to attack English ships, and publicly emphasizing the government's full commitment to preventing the enslavement of Englishmen on the high seas. By the eighteenth century, this national mission and the government's commitment to it had become institutionalized, as evidenced in the words of James Thomson's poem "Rule, Britannia": "Rule, Britannia, rule the waves; Britons never will be slaves."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cardini, *Europe and Islam*, p. 117.

<sup>46</sup> There are still regularly performed operas about the captive phenomenon that were written centuries after Shakespeare's and Cervantes's lifetimes. Two examples are Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Abduction from Seraglio* (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*) (1782) and Gioachino Antonio Rossini's *The Italian Girl of Algiers* (*L'Italiana in Algeri*) (1813). I thank Paul du Quenoy for reminding me of the historical significance of these two plays.

<sup>47</sup> Colley, *Captives*, p. 50. Another critical factor in the English Civil War was Charles I's decision to impose "ship money" on the English people without the consent of Parliament. "Ship money" was a tax imposed on all English counties to build a navy and to protect merchants and coastal communities from seaborne attacks, including from Muslim pirates. Such a tax had been imposed on English coastal communities in the past but not on inland communities, which faced little danger of attack.

<sup>48</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 142; and Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, p. 78. In a revised version of the poem, Thomson added the lines "that cruel trade / Which spoils unhappy Guinea of her sons." Hudson, "Britons Never Will Be Slaves," p. 566.

Across the channel, Muslim maritime attacks and enslavement of Christian Europeans in the Mediterranean led to significant changes in how the French conceived of their relationship to their central government and basic rights as subjects of the French king. As Gillian Weiss observes in her study of petitions forwarded by French captives in North Africa from 1500 to 1800, "Barbary Captivity and the French Idea of Freedom," French monarchs ignored the plight of French captives in North Africa before the late seventeenth century.<sup>49</sup> French men and women caught in slavery in North Africa instead sought the aid of prominent families in their home communities and administrative institutions, such as town councils, the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce, and Catholic orders.<sup>50</sup> Because these institutions were focused on preserving local society, they focused their efforts on freeing those with local ties and those who supported families. Although the French upheld the principle that all those who were from the kingdom were guaranteed freedom ("there are no slaves in France"), in reality a French captive's ability to secure freedom from slavery in North Africa hinged on his or her local identity in France and social role there rather than his or her national identity as "French."

But the publicity surrounding Muslim captives and the growing might of the French state in the Mediterranean made it appear that the enslavement of Frenchmen was no longer a purely a local concern. It was now seen as a serious affront to the French monarch's power and his glory.<sup>51</sup> Whereas seventeenth-century petitions from unfortunate merchants or sailors more often stressed "regional connections," eighteenth-century appeals were addressed directly to the king and often "offered paeans to the patrie."<sup>52</sup> During the final years of Louis XIV's rule and those of his successors, the French state paid ransoms and took aggressive measures using its most advanced weapons against Muslim states to both protect and free French captives. By doing so, Louis solidified two principles of French law and later Euro-Atlantic life: all subjects, regardless of social status and geographic origin, should be free, and it was the responsibility of the state to guarantee that freedom. It no longer mattered where you were from within France or what your social role was. And out of these promises in part would emerge French national identity.

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<sup>49</sup> Gillian Weiss, "Barbary Captivity and the French Idea of Freedom," *French Historical Studies* 28, no. 2 (2005): 239.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 247–248.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

## ISLAM, NATURAL LAW, UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Those principles, in turn, would also play an integral role in two groundbreaking sociopolitical movements in the Euro-Atlantic in which Islam once again played an important role: the War of the American Revolution and the rise of universal notions of human rights in the English-speaking world. For philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Jefferson, Muslims were not a signal of God's disfavor or a serious strategic threat requiring national unity and immediate state action. Instead, Muslims functioned as a central element in a political debate in which their inclusion in Euro-Atlantic society and political structures helped to demonstrate the universality of their vision of human rights and political freedoms.

At first glance, however, Islam's centrality to a political debate originating in English-speaking Europe and North America should come as a surprise. While many of the leaders who first led European explorations in the Americas had experience fighting Muslims and brought Muslim farming techniques (i.e., rice and sugar plantations) to British North America, Muslims lacked a presence there equivalent to the one they maintained in the Mediterranean. American coastal settlements were never "infested" with Muslims nor attacked by them. Muslim populations were overwhelmingly slaves and situated in the American south, especially in the Carolinas and Georgia.<sup>53</sup> In Charleston and other cities in the Carolinas and Georgia one could find Arabic speakers, and some Muslims performed Islamic rituals, such as fasting during Ramadan and preparing *saraka*, a sugar cake used by West African Muslims for voluntary alms.<sup>54</sup> (Making *saraka* survived as an African-

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<sup>53</sup> Peter H. Wood, Daniel C. Littlefield, Judith A. Carney, and other scholars have long argued that these populations reflected the preference of Euro-Americans for Senegambians, experts at growing the chief crop in the Carolinas and Georgia, rice. This thesis, or the "Black Rice Thesis," has been widely accepted among scholars but was recently challenged by David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson in the *American Historical Review*. In the article, they argued that statistical analysis of slave voyage data suggested that the presence of Senegambians had to do with a multitude of factors and not solely with the preferences of southern planters for slaves from a particular region of Africa. For more on this controversy, see David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (December 2007): 1329–1358.

<sup>54</sup> Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 65–66 and 75–80.



American tradition into the twentieth century and appears in Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon*.)<sup>55</sup> Despite these several instances, there were very few identifiably Muslim communities in the Carolinas, Georgia, or anywhere else in colonial British North America.<sup>56</sup>

The absence of a clear Muslim presence, however, did not mean that Anglophile North Americans were unaware of Islam. The accounts of Europeans (and some Americans) enslaved in Muslim societies, Protestant sermons, and other writings on Islam gave Anglo-Americans the confidence that they, like Martin Luther, had sufficient knowledge of Islam to use it as a tool to establish the superiority of their religious beliefs over all "challengers" and to undermine the legitimacy of Islam. References to Muslims "pepper the public documents of early America" and were central to the collective identity of colonial Americans.<sup>57</sup> For them, Protestant Christians lived in free societies and were entitled to liberty, while Muslims lived in despotic societies that hindered liberty and progress and were essentially defined by slavery. The once flourishing societies of the Muslim Middle East also provided a cautionary tale for many Americans of what could happen if they hindered the progress of liberty.<sup>58</sup> As Timothy Marr and other scholars have noted, this "Orientalist" perspective continues to define much of the contemporary American discussions of Islam and Muslim societies.<sup>59</sup>

Such "Orientalist" beliefs allowed colonial Americans to maintain their prejudices, but even misinformation may retain an element of truth, of information. At least colonial Americans were not completely ignorant of Islam. Jefferson would not have purchased George Sale's

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<sup>55</sup> In the novel, the character Milkman hears a group of children singing a song that specifically refers to making *saraka* cake. Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1987), p. 303.

<sup>56</sup> Nor were Muslims confined to southern colonies. Anthony Jansen Van Vaes, often called "Anthony the Turk," lived in what would become New York in the seventeenth century. He appears frequently in court records as a prominent landlord and may have converted his Dutch wife to Islam. New York's heterogeneous populations most likely contained some Muslims during the eighteenth century, especially since the city's merchants carried out a profitable trade in slaves and other goods with Madagascar, which had an important Muslim minority population. For more on these issues, see Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 128–142, 148–149.

<sup>57</sup> Kidd, "Is It Worse to Follow Mahomet than the Devil?" pp. 766–767.

<sup>58</sup> Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776–1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 46.

<sup>59</sup> Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–19.

translation to the Qur'an had he not read Freiherr von Pufendorf's *Of the Law of Nature and Nations*, which observes that the Qur'an's teachings on murder, revenge, and a host of other issues are consistent with Greco-Roman beliefs and natural law. In addition, Sale, in the introduction to the Qur'an that Jefferson bought, argues passionately that gaining an understanding of the Qur'an constituted an element of "contemporary" knowledge: "To be acquainted with the various law and constitutions of civilized nations, especially those of who flourish in our own time, is, perhaps, the most useful part of knowledge."<sup>60</sup>

Nor were Sale's arguments or a positive view of Islam uncommon or necessarily antithetical to mainstream Euro-American thought in either the seventeenth or the eighteenth century. Europeans may have not considered Islam equal to Christianity, but, as Colley rightly observes, they viewed its achievements and urban civilization with enormous respect—if not awe at times.<sup>61</sup> The English lexicographer Samuel Johnson articulated this viewpoint: "There are two objects of curiosity—the Christian world, and the Mahometan [Muslim] world. All the rest may be considered as barbarous."<sup>62</sup> In "A Letter Concerning Toleration," John Locke, the English philosopher, went so far as to argue that Muslims should not be excluded from enjoying English civil rights solely because of their religion (a right he did not extend to Christian Catholics): "Nay, if we may openly speak the truth, and as becomes one man to another, neither pagan, nor Mahometan [Muslim], nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth, because of his religion. The Gospel commands no such thing. The church, 'which judgeth not those that are without,' I Cor. V. 11, wants it not. And the commonwealth, which embraces indifferently all men that are honest, peaceful, and industrious, requires it not."<sup>63</sup> Locke's words reflected his own acquaintance with Islam: he read Arabic, owned a Qur'an, and knew leading English Arabists.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *The Koran*, trans. George Sale, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: J. W. Moore, 1856), p. iv.

<sup>61</sup> Colley, *Captives*, p. 106.

<sup>62</sup> Albert Hourani, "Islam in European Thought," in *Islam in European Thought*, by Albert Hourani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 249.

<sup>64</sup> G. A. Russell, "The Impact of the *Philosophus Autodidactus*: Pocokes, John Locke, and the Society of Friends," in *The "Arabick" Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. G. A. Russell (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), pp. 231, 238–239, 247.

As Jefferson sought to reconcile natural law with the Stamp Act, he embraced the vision of Islam advocated by Locke.<sup>65</sup> He learned Arabic, purchased a translation of the Qur'an, and befriended two leading scholars of the Arab world, C. F. Volney and Samuel Henley.<sup>66</sup> Jefferson's *Notes on Religion*, published in 1776, directly quotes Locke's assertion that Muslims should not be denied civil rights because of their religious beliefs. Jefferson applied similar values when he proposed Virginia's Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in 1779.<sup>67</sup> Decades after the bill became law, Jefferson recalled in his memoirs that the bill protected the rights of "the Jew, the gentile, the Christian and Mahometan [i.e., Muslim], the Hindoo, and infidel of every denomination."<sup>68</sup> Together, Jefferson's *Notes on Religion* and his comments on the Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom signal a conscious inclusion of Muslims in his notions of toleration and political equality. What was the basis of this notion?

Jefferson's universalistic vision of human rights challenged the Anglo-American principle that freedoms flowed from a specific group's identity (*Britons never will be slaves*).<sup>69</sup> Jefferson did not believe that Americans were free because they were Americans or Protestant Christians. He could not credibly claim that the values he promoted were truly universal unless he showed that they applied to Muslims as well as to all other men. For Jefferson, deconstructing Orientalist constructs was a precondition for the success of liberty in the United States. For him, it was "self-evident" that "*all men are created equal*."

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<sup>65</sup> Jefferson did not adopt the negative view of Muhammad and Islam that Voltaire presents in *Mahomet ou le Fantaisme* or even the slightly more nuanced version of Muhammad the French author presents in *L'Essai sur les Moeurs des Nations*. For more on Voltaire's views of Islam and Muhammad, see Cardini, *Europe and Islam*, pp. 155–161.

<sup>66</sup> Kevin J. Hays, "How Thomas Jefferson Read the Qur'an," *Early American Literature* 39, no. 2 (2004): 257–258, 261.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *The Complete Jefferson: Containing His Major Writings, Published and Unpublished, Except His Letters*, ed. Saul K. Padover (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), p. 945.

<sup>68</sup> Denise A. Spellberg, "Could a Muslim Be President? An Eighteenth-Century Constitutional Debate," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 4 (2006): 490–491. Jefferson made an equally strong statement in 1818 in a letter to the first Jew born in America to reach national prominence, Mordecai Noah (1785–1851): "Your sect, by its suffering, has furnished a remarkable proof of the universal religious intolerance inherent in every sect, disclaimed by all while feeble, and practiced by all when in power; our laws have applied the only anecdote to this vice, protecting our religious, as they do our civil rights, by putting all on an equal footing." Mordecai Manuel Noah, *The Selected Writings of Mordecai Noah*, ed. Michael Joseph Schuldiner and Daniel J. Kleinfeld (Westport, Conn.: Greenfield Press, 1999), p. 126.

<sup>69</sup> Italics are not in the original text. Spacks, *Eighteenth Century*, p. 142.

Jefferson's vision of equality and human rights subsequently emerged in the chief American political document of his lifetime, the U.S. Constitution. Not only did the document guarantee religious liberty to American citizens, it also provided a right that many state constitutions of the time did not: it permitted all free men, regardless of their religious affiliation, to hold any federal office, including the presidency. The second clause of Article IV mandated that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." Instead, the first clause of the third section of Article VI of the document stipulated that all U.S. senators and representatives, members of state legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the states, "shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution." There was no mention of religion at all. Ultimately, the U.S. Constitution had codified Jefferson's new conception of human rights that went beyond anything conceived of by Locke: Muslims and other non-Protestant Christians were not just tolerated; they theoretically could be full citizens and participate in the highest levels of American political life.

Although there were just a few thousand Jews in America and even fewer free Muslims in the eighteenth century, the potential implications of the Constitution's guarantees for future American life did not go unnoticed by Jefferson's colleagues who gathered at various state conventions to ratify the U.S. Constitution starting in 1787. As Denise Spellberg observes in "Could a Muslim Be President? An Eighteenth-Century Constitutional Debate," the issue arose in New Hampshire's state convention in 1788, and the delegates to North Carolina's convention in 1788 devoted an entire day of debate if it was possible for Muslims, Jews, and other non-Protestants to become president and what the implications would be for the future of the young nation. For at least a day, Muslims were "symbolically embroiled in the definition of what it meant to be American citizens."<sup>70</sup>

At the heart of the dispute was the Constitution's ban on religious tests for public office and its requirement that officeholders swear allegiance only to the U.S. Constitution. For some North Carolinian delegates, whose constitution only protected the rights of free males who did not deny "the Truth of the Protestant Religion," the Constitution's prohibition on religious tests set a dangerous precedent that could give Muslims, Jews, and Catholics the opportunity to gain power and com-

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<sup>70</sup> Spellberg, "Could a Muslim Be President," p. 485.

pel Americans to abandon their Protestant Christian routes and way of life. They even raised the specter of the pope becoming president. Federalists, who supported the Constitution, downplayed these fears and argued that the nation's Protestant Christian roots were unshakable. They contended it would be only after a lengthy period of time—four hundred or five hundred years—before a Catholic or a Muslim would become president. Strikingly, these arguments did not immediately carry the day; the convention in North Carolina overwhelmingly rejected the constitution (184 to 89). North Carolina would ratify the Constitution only in 1789 at another convention with a different group of delegates after the new union and the U.S. federal government had already come into existence.<sup>71</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Nearly two centuries after Jefferson's death, Americans continue to grapple with the implications of his vision, much like delegates to the convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution in North Carolina in 1788. Despite the importance of individual rights to U.S. law and the constitution, some Americans retain the conviction of many in that convention that their national identity and freedoms are the result of their status as Christians.<sup>72</sup> Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to the U.S. Congress, exemplifies Jefferson's vision—a vision of a multi-religious society in which people of every creed, including Islam, can hold elected office. If we look for the roots of what the African-American writer Ishmael Reed calls "MultiAmerica," we can find them in the works of Thomas Jefferson. It was only fitting that Ellison should use Jefferson's Qur'an when he was sworn into Congress in January 2007.

Yet it is important to remember that the use of Islam to justify social change and political reform in the Atlantic basin predates the third U.S. president and author of the Declaration of Independence by centuries. Muslims occupied significant portions of Europe since the Middle Ages, contributed to the continent's socioeconomic devel-

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 492–502.

<sup>72</sup> For instance, a poll released on September 11, 2007, concluded that 55 percent of Americans believe erroneously that the U.S. Constitution establishes America as a "Christian nation." Andrea Stone, "Most Think Founders Wanted Christian USA," *USA Today*, September 11, 2007 ([http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-11-amendment\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-11-amendment_N.htm)).

opment, and figured prominently in European religious and political discourses. The Ottoman seizure of Constantinople and southeastern Europe helped to set the stage for the Protestant Reformation along with European expansion into the Atlantic world, an event generally considered to be the starting point of the history of the Atlantic basin. In reality, however, Columbus's voyage simply "extended the Muslim-Christian interactions begun hundreds of years earlier in Iberia, North Africa, and elsewhere in the Mediterranean."<sup>73</sup>

Muslims played a crucial role in Atlantic history from the beginning. They helped shape the location, culture, size, and industries of Europe's settlements in the Americas and later the nations of the Western hemisphere. The inheritance of the United States and the other nations of the Atlantic basin extends beyond the confines of Europe to the Islamic world. Over the last five hundred years, Muslims have influenced movements of social change and reform and nation building in Atlantic basin societies from Germany to British North America. They have helped shape elite and popular conceptions of political rights, religion, national identity, commerce, and literature in the Atlantic basin. It is "self-evident" that they deserve an "equal" place in our conception of this region and the history of Euro-Atlantic societies.

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<sup>73</sup> Gomez, *Black Crescent*, p. 5.