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"I DON'T FEEL ANY OPPRESSED AT ALL": AFRICAN AMERICAN SUNNI WOMEN IN DETROIT

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Abstract

This article presents an ethnographic case study of Sunni women at The Muslim Center in Detroit, Michigan, regardless of any previous affiliation with the Nation of Islam (NOI). African American Muslim women, both those in the NOI and those outside it, navigate an intersectional space where their race, culture, and identity intersect with their faith. Often converts, these women have chosen a religion that resembles the Victorian framework of the Cult of Domesticity. Similar to how the Cult of Domesticity was created to give women an equally important yet complementary role during America's early years, the tenets of piety, purity, submission, domesticity, and, for Black women, racial uplift define the identity of Black Sunni women. Rather than seeing these ideals as oppressive, Black Muslim women embrace them, actively embodying their faith, cultural identity, and lived experiences, providing them a voice and status within their families and communities. It is easy to view Victorian gender ideals as oppressive and limiting from a modern perspective. However, these ideals aimed to recognize and crystallize women's significant impact on their families and communities. Without their piety, purity, domesticity, submissiveness, and dedication to racial uplift, the sweeping social movements that have fundamentally changed the nation might not have occurred. Women used the power given to them under the Cult of Domesticity to occupy two seemingly incongruous spaces: private, submissive nurturers and public, assertive leaders for change. Similarly, African American Sunni women harness the power of Islam to do the same.

Keywords

African American Muslims, Islam in Detroit, Black Muslims, Black Islam, Muslim women, religious identity, race and religion, gender and Islam, faith practices

Introduction

A common misconception among some Americans is that a fundamental tenet of Islam is the oppression of women. A simple Google search will yield documents from organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League that are working to correct such stereotypes and misinformation.[1] African American Muslim women find themselves occupying an intersectional space where their race, culture, and identity engage with their faith. Typically converts, these women have chosen a religion that resembles the Victorian framework of the Cult of Domesticity.[2] As modern Black women who have chosen a faith that embraces traditional gender ideals and battles notions of oppression, it would be easy to ascribe to them feelings of subservience.

The Cult of Domesticity provides a valuable lens for examining African American Sunni Muslims, as it highlights historical similarities and underscores the crucial role of women in upholding the moral and social fabric of their communities. The Cult of Domesticity and the principles embraced by African American Sunni Muslim women stress virtues such as piety, purity, submission, and domestic duties. These shared values demonstrate how women navigate established roles to achieve influence and status in both contexts. This framework highlights the intersectionality of race, religion, and gender, showing how African American Sunni Muslim women uniquely adapt and embody these roles. It reveals their distinct challenges and opportunities, setting them apart from immigrant Muslim women.

Moreover, the Cult of Domesticity framework sheds light on how African American Sunni Muslim women derive empowerment and a strong sense of identity from the roles and virtues outlined by their faith. Adopting and reshaping these ideals maintains cultural continuity while addressing contemporary issues. Both frameworks (the Cult of Domesticity and traditional Islamic practices) acknowledge women's contributions to community building and social change. Similar to how women in the Cult of Domesticity used their roles to champion social

movements, African American Sunni Muslim women harness their faith and cultural values to promote social justice and racial uplift in their communities. This comparison enhances our understanding of how these women integrate traditional values with modern goals to lead meaningful lives and positively impact their communities.

Further, using the Cult of Domesticity as a framework to examine African American Sunni Muslim women is more effective than relying solely on an Islamic framework because it incorporates the multifaceted intersectionality of race, gender, and religion that these women experience. While an Islamic framework provides valuable insights into religious practices and beliefs, it may not fully address the unique cultural and historical contexts of African American women. The Cult of Domesticity framework, however, recognizes the specific historical role of African American women in shaping their communities and acknowledges how these women navigate and redefine traditional gender roles to gain influence and status. By integrating both frameworks, we gain a more nuanced perspective on how African American Sunni Muslim women balance their identities and contribute to their families and communities.

This research adds to the growing scholarship focused on African American Muslim women. Although much of the past scholarship has centered on the lives and legacies of Black Muslim men, a growing body of work is currently developing that focuses on the lived experiences of Black Muslim women. Although this growth signals a change in academicians' focus, there is still a considerable gap in the type of scholarship produced about them. Most books that center on Black Muslim women tend to focus on current or former Nation of Islam (NOI) members.[3] While Sunni Muslim women have been included in these works, these scholars' narratives are focused on how these women have "understood, experienced, and contributed to the Nation of Islam throughout its eighty-year history. …[and] how women have interpreted and navigated the NOI's gender ideologies and practices considering their multilayered identities as women of ethnic minorities in America."[4] Works that focus on African American Sunni women are scarce.[5]

As late as 2018, Islamic scholar Sylvia Chan-Malik recognized the significant gap in the literature regarding the experiences of African American Sunni women in Islam. In *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* (2018), Chan-Malik notes:

> In the existing literature on American Islam, men's voices and perspectives dominate... texts addressing U.S. Muslim women's issues… generally [separates]… the stories of Black American and non-Black American Muslim women, who are primarily Arab and South Asian American, although not at all exclusively. As a result… texts on U.S. Muslim women, perhaps inadvertently, privilege the stories of non-Black Muslim women of Arab and South Asian backgrounds and relay U.S. Muslim subject formation as a process of immigrant Muslims 'becoming American.' Such language enacts an erasure of the lives and representations of Black Muslim women (who are already American) and generally relegates their experiences to a separate chapter or section, as opposed to situating them as a central component of Islam's historical narrative in the United States.[6]

My research aims to complement the broader narrative of African American women by focusing on a micro-community within this demographic. This approach is crucial because it allows for a detailed examination of the unique experiences and contributions of African American Sunni women, who are often overshadowed in broader discussions. By concentrating on a specific community, my research highlights the diverse ways in which these women navigate their faith, cultural identity, and societal roles. This micro-level focus provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of their lives and helps fill the gap in scholarship, ensuring their voices are included in the historical narrative of Islam in the United States.

Focusing on predominantly African American congregants of The Muslim Center (TMC) in Detroit, Michigan, this article presents an ethnographic case study of Sunni women in Detroit, regardless of their previous affiliation with the Nation of Islam.[7] I demonstrate that African American Muslim women significantly contribute to the various programs at The Muslim Center and their broader community. By highlighting the leadership roles these women occupy within their homes and The Muslim Center, I challenge popular narratives that portray African American Muslim women as subservient (at best) or oppressed (at worst). These women embrace empowerment, believe in equity between men and women, and actively shape their lives and the lives of community members. Much like the Cult of Domesticity provided women with an equally important yet complementary role during America's early years, the tenets of piety, purity, submission, domesticity, and racial uplift define the identity of Black Sunni women.

Grounding this case study in Detroit is particularly relevant since the Nation of Islam was founded in the Black Bottom neighborhood of Detroit in 1930 by silk peddler and self-proclaimed Meccan descendant Wallace Fard. By 1934, the Nation boasted hundreds of followers. However, it took decades before the NOI received widespread acclaim and recognition. By embedding their socio-political philosophy of racial uplift in the rhetoric of African American religiosity, the NOI introduced many African Americans to Islam and provided a foundation for social and economic redemption. The legacy of Islam in Black Detroit demonstrated its widespread acceptance

among African American residents. It highlighted their ability to shape a vision of Islam that addressed the specific nuances of their lives in that era. Consequently, African Muslims in Detroit occupy a historic space with unique ties to the African American Muslim tradition, which is built on addressing the community's social and secular needs while encouraging practitioners to maintain their secular identities.

This work contributes to African American studies by centering marginalized voices, a rarity in the scholarship on Islam in Black America. It also enriches Islamic studies by focusing on the specific practices of the African American Muslim community, contrasting with most works that emphasize macro practices. Using interviews to center practitioners' narratives, this research provides a micro-history of African American Sunni Muslims in Detroit.

It was essential to engage in critical ethnography to restore the narrative voice of Muslims who attend The Muslim Center. In *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2012), D. Soyini Madison argues that critical ethnography involves using the ethnographer's resources, skills, and privileges to make accessible the experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained.[8] This ethnography includes semi-structured interviews to disrupt the power dynamic that has dominated the academic discourse on African American Islam. Instead of scholars dictating what African American Muslims believe, this research allows community members to speak about their lived realities. Despite their challenges, oral histories are crucial for capturing their thoughts and expressions.

This project is framed from the position of participant observer. As a participant-observer, I engaged in The Muslim Center's activities. Being a native Detroiter and a Muslim for over twenty years, my positionality allowed me to participate in religious functions and interact with other African Americans from Detroit. This deepened my understanding of their community's social and economic dynamics. I aimed to highlight this community's practices and place them within the context of African American Muslim practices. In addition to participant observation, I relied on interviews, conversations with congregants, and field notes to drive the narrative. I engaged with members of this community hundreds of times from January 2019 through June 2021 until the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted my interviews. During that time, I formally interviewed over 20 individuals and had numerous discussions with attendees who preferred informal conversations over formal interviews. One limitation of my interviews was that some women would talk to me but did not want a formal interview without a *Wali* (male guardian) present.[9] Having established the unique role of Islam in addressing the socio-economic needs of African Americans in Detroit, it is also essential to explore how the tenets of the Cult of Domesticity provide a framework for understanding the lives and experiences of Muslim women in this unique space.

Piety & Purity

Within the Cult of Domesticity, piety was considered the core of a woman's virtue and the source of her strength. Nineteenth-century advice manuals advised young men to prioritize finding a pious mate, as all other virtues would follow.[10] Republican Motherhood had imbued women with additional virtue, making them central figures of piety in the home. Religion did not draw a woman away from her domestic duties; instead, church work complemented her role as a domestic and submissive figure.[11] Historian Shirley Carlson describes the Black Victorian woman as "morally unassailable…virtuous and modest."[12] Piety and purity worked together to elevate womanhood, enabling women to embody the virtues envisioned by Republican Motherhood.

From an Islamic perspective, purity encompasses both physical and spiritual cleanliness. It involves maintaining physical cleanliness, such as removing perceptible filth through ritual purification and achieving spiritual purity by purging vices and adhering to Quranic rules. Cleanliness and purity are essential ideals in Muslim piety and consciousness. For example, *wudu* (ablution) involves cleansing oneself before prayer, signifying the need to be physically and spiritually pure before engaging with the Creator. This ritual consists of washing away impurities from the eyes (what was seen), ears (what was heard), and body (what was touched), allowing one to approach God in a clean state.

Additionally, piety and purity within a mosque are maintained by having men and women enter through separate doors, with a wall often dividing them once inside. This barrier is intended to deter the male gaze, as traditionalists believe that men and women praying together would distract men from their prayers. Implementing gender separation often depends on the congregants' cultural traditions and religious interpretations. This practice was brought to the United States by immigrant Muslims and has been prevalent since the eleventh century, following the teachings of theologian jurist Sufi Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who deemed it improper for young men and women in mosques to sit without a partition.[13]

However, the practice of gender separation in mosques and the debates surrounding its necessity are not rooted in Islamic tradition, considering "that even conservative exegetes acknowledge that separate spaces for men and women did not exist in the Prophet Muhammad's time."[14] Despite these debates, the prevalent practice of gender separation remains a significant topic in Islamic discourse, especially in the historiography of women in Islam. In *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism,* Juliane Hammer notes that in debates

surrounding physical barriers, "the practice of the Prophet Muhammad is weighed against the danger of sexual temptation, which in turn would result in fitnah in the community." The argument against joint prayer spaces focuses on conceptions of women's sexuality, and "To claim that men will be distracted by the presence of women is to describe women…as a sexual temptation."[15]

However, modern Islamic scholars argue that the partition is not supported by any legal ruling. In *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, Amina Wadud notes that gender separation is "neither a matter of faith nor a principle of Islamic dogma and creed. It was never emphasized in the Qur'an, which instead recommends ways for women and men to observe *modest* limits while in each other's presence."[16] Critics state that gender separation in mosques creates "separate and unequal spaces," which disadvantages Muslim women by limiting their access to their imams.[17] While men can ask questions directly and be fully involved in the learning process, women in segregated spaces must write down their questions and pass them to men, who then relay them to the imam. This restricted access to religious leaders forces Muslim women to root their understanding of the religion from a male perspective, limiting their engagement with their beliefs and practices. Although gender separation may seem problematic from an external viewpoint, the women of the TMC welcomed it because it allowed for their inclusion while maintaining the ideals of piety and purity. I observed this welcoming attitude immediately.

My first visit to The Muslim Center was a novel experience. I entered through the same doors as the female congregants. We walked through the same hallway, greeting each other with *as-salamu-alaykum* as we passed. Although we entered the prayer hall through different doors, we eventually ended up in the same prayer room. This was unique for me, as most immigrant mosques I have attended in and around Detroit have separate entrances for men and women. At TMC, men sit in front of the prayer hall, and women sit behind them. This arrangement, rooted in Islamic tradition, does not seem to create feelings of hostility or exclusion among the female members.

Women do not feel limited in their participation or religious study; instead, they welcome this seating arrangement. One congregant, Sara, joked, "I would rather pray behind the men. We praying and bending over in front of men, and men gone be men. But seriously, that is how the Prophet did it."[18] This arrangement allows her to be both pious and modest (pure). Her statement echoes Jamillah Karim's findings about Muslim women in Chicago and Atlanta, who view separated spaces as the most logical gender arrangement. Karim noted, "Instead of viewing women's position in the rear as a symbol of men's ontological supremacy over women, as many non-Muslim visitors interpret it, many Muslim women prefer this arrangement because it prevents men from gazing at their elevated rear parts when they prostrate."[19] From a logistical standpoint, separating men and women also ensures purity during prayer by preventing physical contact with male strangers.[20]

The use of partitions in mosques can create feelings of hostility among women who believe their limited access to religious leaders hinders their participation and growth in their faith. This sentiment was particularly evident among several women from The Muslim Center. They reported feeling excluded from the religious community when visiting other nearby mosques, such as Masjid Al-Falah in Hamtramck (primarily Bengali Muslims) and Masjid Mu'ath Bin Jabal (primarily Yemeni Muslims), which use partitions to separate men and women. As a result, many women felt disconnected from the community and sought more inclusive mosques, such as The Muslim Center.

Their experience of the differences between immigrant and Black mosque practices is supported by Karen Leonard's findings that "in 81 percent of immigrant mosques, women pray behind a curtain or in another room, but in only 30 percent of African-American mosques do women do this do this."[21] A 2013 report on women in American mosques found that Black mosques, particularly those following the leadership of W. Deen Muhammad, tend to be more women-friendly.[22] This welcoming environment is reflected in the higher participation of African American women (23% of congregants) compared to immigrant mosques (16% of congregants). Additionally, African American mosques have more female representation on mosque boards (75%) compared to Arab mosques (44%). Within the African American community, W. Deen Muhammad mosques are more likely to allow women's board participation (98%) compared to other African American mosques (78%).[23] Women who feel welcome in a religious space, with greater access to their spiritual leaders and more voice in the community, can better embrace their role as pious and pure women.

In contrast to many immigrant Muslim mosques, African American Muslims have consciously chosen to pray in desegregated spaces. By allowing men and women to occupy the same sacred space with equal access to the imam, The Muslim Center reflects the broader African American Muslim community's commitment to equality within the religious sphere. This setup also enables limited intermixing of men and women. On a practical level, this intermingling meets more than just religious needs. As one center member, Omar, noted, "Most mosques that you go to, you don't even know that it's women in the mosque. The Muslim Center, everybody mixes and mingles, which is a good thing because how you gonna find a wife if you don't ever see one?"[24] The interaction between men and women is one reason he made TMC his home. Thus, like other Black mosques, The Muslim Center caters to the African American community's needs by allowing male and female congregants to commingle, helping women find husbands while maintaining their purity.

African American Muslim women navigate their faith by embracing Islamic traditions of piety and purity similar to the tenets of the Cult of Domesticity. Within the Cult of Domesticity, a woman's virtue and strength were rooted in her piety and purity, making her a central figure of morality in the home and community. This framework is mirrored in Islamic practices emphasizing physical and spiritual cleanliness, such as the ritual of wudu, which reflects the need for purity before engaging with the Creator. Unlike many immigrant mosques that enforce strict gender separation, African American mosques like The Muslim Center foster inclusive environments where men and women share the same sacred space and have equal access to religious leaders. This inclusive approach allows women to actively participate in religious life while empowering them to fully embrace their roles as pious and virtuous individuals, much like the Cult of Domesticity's focus on women's moral and domestic responsibilities. By allowing men and women to intermingle, The Muslim Center meets the community's practical needs, supports women in fulfilling both religious and cultural expectations of piety and purity, and sets the stage for a discussion of how other tenets (domesticity and submissiveness) are also reflected in the lives of these women.

Domesticity and Submissiveness

If piety gave a Victorian woman moral authority, domesticity gave her power. She was dedicated to the domestic sphere and everything within it. She was to be proficient in all kinds of needlework, which she used to adorn her house or give as gifts. As a wife, she was expected to create a moral safe haven that was well-kept, attractive, comfortable, and well-run. She ensured that household bills were paid (with her husband's money) and practiced frugality with it. She was a devoted and supportive companion in a loving partnership where she was subordinate and submissive in the household hierarchy. Men were the active movers in the relationship, and women were the submissive responders. The 1830 *Young Lady's Book* instructed women that whatever her age, "a spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of mind, are required from her."[25] Another advice manual reminded women that they were dependent and asked men for "wisdom, constancy, firmness, perseverance," and, in return, "she is willing to repay it all by the surrender of the full treasure of her affections."[26] As a mother, she was expected to instill virtue in her children and tend to their health. To aid in this, cookbooks of the period were filled with recipes to cure various ailments and provide nourishing food. Should illness take one of her children, she was to bear that with submission as well.[27] The outpouring of nineteenth-century social movements led by women illustrates how they increasingly used the Cult of Domesticity to extend their reach to combat social problems around them. They walked a fine line, balancing active roles in organizations like temperance, abolition, and education reform with the proper submission that the Cult of Domesticity required.

Women at The Muslim Center walk a similar line. While men are often the public spokesmen for the establishment, women are acknowledged by the community as the true leaders. One congregant, Khalil, described this dynamic: "They [women] have a major role in keeping The Muslim Center going, you know? We're more upfront where we are like the protectors, the providers. But the women, they are the ones you see behind the scenes...."[28] This supportive role is closely tied to family and domestic tasks.

The centrality of family and motherhood embodies how African American Muslim women at the center see themselves, with their well-being inextricably linked to the family. The family takes precedence over the individual, aligning with African American (and West African) cultural traditions that are communal. Consequently, women find significant agency and respect in rearing children, maintaining the household, and supporting men as heads of the family. The responsibility of teaching children moral and social values was evident in the women I spoke with, who took particular pride in their role as mothers. This pride is rooted in the Quran, which teaches that one's mother deserves love and good treatment more than one's father.[29]

Muslim women use this Quranic verse as evidence that they should be accorded more love and respect than anyone else in the world. They see their status as mothers as an essential contribution to their religion and family lives. They believe that their role as mothers is complemented by men performing fatherhood and acting as the head of the household. However, while they allow men to assume the role of "leader," the women in this community view themselves as the true leaders of their households. When I asked Tia, one of the TMC's attendees, about the role of women in the home, she stated, "The protector. Protect your home. Make it a place of peace for your husband if you have one or yourself first. That's not even just for Muslim women; that's for all women. Our responsibility is to keep our home together. Keep the peace."[30] Creating a peaceful sanctuary for her husband is the essence of Victorian domesticity.

In the Cult of Domesticity, a woman's primary duty was to create a serene and orderly home environment, providing a refuge for her husband from the outside world. This role involved physical tasks like cleaning and cooking, and emotional labor such as nurturing and supporting her husband and children. The responsibilities they shoulder—maintaining household harmony, instilling moral values in their children, and supporting their husbands—mirror the principles of the Cult of Domesticity. Similarly, women at The Muslim Center embrace this role by ensuring their homes are places of peace and comfort. These Muslim women take pride in their roles, seeing them as vital to the well-being of their families and the strength of their communities. This blend of religious duty

and cultural tradition underscores the enduring relevance of domestic roles in fostering a stable and nurturing environment.

I followed up this question by asking Tia what she meant by "protector" of the home, and she stated:

> Just see like, my husband being incarcerated and just coming home. You know? He has a lot going against him out here. So I try not to let that come inside the house even though I do because we go at it, but it's supposed to be a peaceful place. House supposed to be clean. Food is supposed to be prepared. Everything you need. He doesn't know what's needed in the house. He don't know if I need a corkscrew or a can opener. He doesn't even know when the vacuum cleaner break. The bills come, I opened them up and put them down like, "here is what needs to be taken care of." So a woman run the home.[31]

During her husband's incarceration, Tia assumed the role of "leader" in two significant ways: she became the provider, supporting both herself and him by adding money to his commissary account (referred to as "putting money on his books" in jail terms), and upon his release, she continued to lead by nurturing him in a society that is often unforgiving to the formerly incarcerated. Tia's experience demonstrates that while she has accepted traditional gender norms, she still sees herself as the household leader. This perspective is not unique to her; many men in the community also recognize and acknowledge their wives as the true leaders of their homes.

When I asked a male respondent what he thought a woman's role in the home entailed, he responded as follows:

> The role of a woman in a home is to be... My wife, she's a great listener. She takes her time with the things she does. She's a great reminder of the things that I need to get done. Cooking is amazing. Very, very nurturing, and I can't stress that enough that she's very nurturing. Always easy on the eyes. She's very intellectual. She manages the money of the household. I'll give her money and she can manage everything that needs to be done. And she does it within the fold of Islam. And she follow the laws of Islam when it comes to what needs to be done first. You know, it says in Islam that the woman controls the home; she controls the affairs. When it comes to the man, the man makes the money, [but] the woman takes the money, and she puts it where it needs to go and that's what she does... I might have the money for the bills, but she pays the bills.[32]

The women's role is also vital for establishing household and community values within the African American community. Another congregant, Mohammad, explained: "Well, you know, like with the kids, you know, just raising of the kids and the handling of the real important values of the community, the women kind of carry that. Yeah, the women carry our values."[33] Women in this community do not have an issue with gender roles; instead, they embrace them. They do not view gender norms as patriarchal but as the ideal societal structure. Within this framework, women are active agents who carve out leadership roles within the home and beyond, as demonstrated by the women's contributions to the economic and social activities at The Muslim Center.

At The Muslim Center, congregants gather in the gymnasium adjacent to the prayer hall after the jummah prayer. Women prepare meals on behalf of TMC to sell to congregants, generating revenue as an economic lifeline for the center. Many women pay $10 weekly to rent tables to sell their goods, including books, newspapers, jewelry, lemonade, popcorn, hijabs, African-styled scarves, bean pies, scented oils, candles, and more. These women are leaders in the marketplace, using their sales to bring in much-needed revenue for their families. In true Victorian fashion, they display their handcraft abilities within the safe confines of the mosque, providing additional resources to enhance their domestic responsibilities.

As Shirley Carlson and Vicki Howard have illustrated, Black Victorian women often took on more roles outside the home than their white counterparts, including employment to help generate family resources. Carlson notes, "The ideal black woman's domain, then, was both the private and the public spheres."[34] Institutions like Spelman and Tuskegee trained Black women to be both wives and mothers with housekeeping and domestic science courses while offering industrial classes for work outside the home.[35] Delores Aldridge highlights that, unlike white women, African American women were "expected to continue to work because, in a society that measured a black worker's worth as less than that of whites, it was necessary that both partners be employed to make ends meet."[36] Consequently, the center's women embody this Victorian ideal by becoming co-leaders of their family units. They fulfill the roles of wives and mothers while using the money earned in the marketplace to contribute significantly to household expenses.

Women's contributions are complicated by the fact that in Islam, the notion of the man as "head of household" is partially premised on the belief that husbands should be the sole providers, as rooted in the Quranic chapter An-Nisa. It states, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means."[37] This verse implies that men are the leaders of their households as long as they provide for women. Given the economic insecurity of some male

congregants at TMC, women are often required to contribute equally to household finances. As a result, many women understand that they have an equal say in the family's economic direction. However, this necessity does not seem to challenge the widely held view in the community that the man is in charge of his household, nor does it lead these women to embrace Western feminist philosophies.

The Quran, hadith, and community issues are often discussed after the jummah prayer when congregants gather to socialize about their week. These conversations sometimes include topics like feminism, LGBTQ+ issues, and gender roles. On one occasion, I overheard Sara and another Muslim woman discussing feminism. Later, I mentioned to Sara that I had heard parts of their conversation and was curious about her thoughts on feminism. Sara said, "They're [feminists] always talking about they don't need a man, and that's fine until they gotta move something heavy or their car breaks down. Who are the first people they call? Men! Ain't nothin' wrong with wanting or needing a man."[38]

Sara's statement reflects the worldview of many women at the center. When I asked several attendees about feminism, the women almost unanimously scowled. Based on my observations and discussions with the women of the center, their reactions to feminism have three implications: (1) They believe that feminism is inconsistent with their worldviews, (2) it underscores their belief that men and women have different physical and psychological characteristics that complement each other, making them interdependent, and (3) it shows that the women of the center have accepted traditional Victorian gender roles.

The common belief among women in this community is that feminism is problematic because it creates tension between men and women, making it incompatible with Islam's teachings. Instead, women use their faith to guide their interactions with men in their quest for equity and equality. Amina McCloud notes that "African-American Muslim women who struggle against male dominance do so within a framework that does not mimic Western feminism. These women seek valid Quranic interpretation."[39] Women also refer to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings to maintain gender justice. In his last sermon, the Prophet Muhammad states that while it is true that men have "certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. If they abide by your right, then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers."[40]

Women in this community leverage the Quran and Sunnah traditions of Prophet Muhammad to protect themselves against unfair treatment and to reflect on their roles in religion and society. They do not seek gender equality in the Western sense, where men and women have equal responsibilities or share the same roles within a relationship. Instead, they believe that each person has different responsibilities within the relationship. Carolyn Rouse explains this phenomenon: "Muslim women recognize Islam to be the first 'feminist' monotheistic religion, and therefore when they choose to identify as Muslims, as opposed to feminists, it is more for political reasons rather than any clear objections to women's equality as defined by the West." She further notes, "The difference is that African Americans acknowledge that there are alternative ways to view the importance of women, and that maybe the model of men and women performing the same roles is not the best way to organize a family or a society."[41]

Rouse's observation that Islam was the first "feminist" religion means that Islam is seen as the first religion to grant women rights not provided by other Abrahamic faiths in the seventh century CE. For example, Muslim women had the right to keep their inheritance and own property, retain gifts given by their ex-husbands in the case of divorce, work and earn a living, be treated kindly, and enjoy equality, where the only distinction between men and women is their faith. Additionally, Islam granted women the right to live, as female infanticide was a common practice in pre-Islamic Arabia.[42] Rouse also highlights the importance of women exercising agency by defining the ideal social and religious structure that best suits their needs. To do otherwise would be to project a theory of oppression onto those who do not view themselves as oppressed.

The notion of women submitting to their husbands may seem oppressive to an outsider, so I asked the women to respond to this perception during the interviews. Specifically, I posed the question: "Muslim women, especially African American Muslim women, are often characterized as being an oppressed group. How do you respond to that criticism?" Tia responded:

> I don't think so. I compare myself to my Christian friends. I feel like I have more freedom, you know? Because there's an understanding with boundaries with what goes on what happens here in my household. So you know your boundaries. You don't cross them. Yeah, I don't feel any oppressed at all.[43]

Her response reflects a common sentiment among African American Muslim women at the center, many of whom have stated that they feel "freer" than their Christian counterparts. Carolyn Rouse notes that "Islamic exegesis for African American Muslims usually includes an analysis of the perceived failures of Christianity... [which] they believe, has been used to promote racism and sexism, while Islam, they argue, balances the rights and responsibilities of men and women."[44] I asked Tia if she thought the perception of oppression was partly due to her wearing hijab, and she responded:

> Yeah. They always asking "Are you hot?" No, I'm cool. I'm actually cooler than you are and you naked. And it draws the proper attention. When I'm out with, let's say if I just had on my little leggings and my tight shirt and my hair out. Oh, I get the "Hey, ooh, hey, baby, babies." When I dress modestly, I get "hello, queen" and that same man is gonna run and open the door for me. It gives people more respect.[45]

Her statement has another implication; it shows that she does not always wear Islamic dress in public. Although Tia was raised in a Muslim household, she did not always practice Islam. While she is currently married and chooses to wear the hijab when she prays, she does not always wear it when she is not going to the mosque. This level of freedom and autonomy in deciding what she wears is a right not afforded to most immigrant Muslim women I have encountered over the years, especially if they are married. Another male interviewee responded to the question of Black Muslim women being an oppressed group:

> I will say that is painfully wrong. That is sadly wrong. Because in Islam, a woman is not only nurtured, she is protected. She's glorified as being one of the most beautiful creatures that Allah has ever created. You know, we respect our women. We love our women. We provide for our women. We protect our women. We control our tongues. We protect our chastity from other women. Our women are held to a high standard. We need to say as the Prophet of Allah *Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam* [peace be upon him] says. It says a man that is the most blessed is a man that's pious to his wife. So that's something that I always remember, and every man in Islam should always remember. It's the fact that, when they're dealing with their woman, to always be pious, you know?[46]

In response to the same question, Omar stated:

> Anybody who think that all they have to do is come to The Muslim Center and they'll see that that's not the case. And every mosque I been to there's never been the case where the women are being oppressed. Matter of fact, in Islam, the woman is held in high esteem. You know what I'm saying? So that's just false information that people that have no idea about Islam pass about.[47]

Mohammad answered:

> Well, most of the women that I deal with who are strongly influenced by Islam. You have to be like, "Wow, sister." I respect her. You know? She has authority. She has an air about herself. You know? Confidence. And I see all that in there. She don't let no man push her around. *Humdulilah* [praise and thanks to God]. And, you know what? She don't have to worry, because she know her duties. You know she's our other half. Make us one. So, *Humdulilah*.[48]

The notion of "protector" was a constant theme when discussing the center's women with various congregants. From an outside perspective, this might seem to echo Ula Taylor's argument that men committed to masculine roles in the Nation of Islam promised women protection while perpetuating patriarchy.[49] However, that is not the case here. The concept of protection at the center extends to guarding one's purity and safeguarding women from physical and mental abuse, even from their husbands. Omar stated:

> I have been here when some women might be going through domestic violence and things like that and we went to the men and straightened him out and let him know that "Listen man, you can't be around here oppressing yo wife man. That ain't the way it go." We'll bring the sister in because we got a staff. They have the degree to deal with domestic violence and people that may have some mental issues going on. What we do is, when we're aware that there's a sister that might be going through something with somebody, we send 'em [the abused] to them [the counselors], and we come up with a plan about how we're going to stop the abuse from going on.[50]

As such, the men at the center see themselves as protectors of the women in both a religious and physical sense, and this protection is not a guise for oppression. By choosing to identify with traditional gender roles, women are embracing domesticity and submission, or what Rouse describes as "engaged surrender." Amina Wadud expands on this concept, arguing that Muslim women "have been inclined towards submission, which sometimes gives the idea that there is no will." However, this perspective is from outsiders who do not understand that submission "involves an active consciousness in participation in our social lives, family lives, community lives, economic lives, and political lives, by the heart which is always open to the will of Allah, and which always gives precedent

to Allah's will."[51] Protection does not mean these women are kept from engaging with the world. On the contrary, Muslim women are encouraged to actively participate in the world around them, especially as it intersects with their faith and the uplift of their community.

The women at The Muslim Center embody the tenets of domesticity and submissiveness similar to the Cult of Domesticity but adapt these ideals to their religious and cultural context. Like Victorian women, who found moral authority in piety and power in their dedication to the domestic sphere, the women at the center take pride in their roles within the home. They create serene and orderly environments, manage household finances, and support their husbands and children, mirroring the Victorian ideal where the home was a moral haven and the woman its heart. At the same time, these women balance their traditional roles with active participation in their community and economic activities. This involvement reflects the historical roles of Black Victorian women, who often worked outside the home to support their families. Women of The Muslim Center embrace the notion of "engaged surrender," where submission to traditional gender roles does not equate to oppression but rather signifies an active and conscious participation in all aspects of life, guided by their faith. Their approach to gender roles is influenced by their interpretation of Islamic teachings, which they see as providing a balanced framework for the rights and responsibilities of men and women. They leverage their faith to ensure fairness and protection within their relationships, upholding the notion of men as protectors while maintaining significant agency and leadership within their households. In essence, the women at The Muslim Center exemplify how domesticity and submissiveness can be sources of strength and agency and contribute to their community through racial uplift.

Racial Uplift

Where Black and white women deviated in their adherence to the tenets of the Cult of Domesticity was the addition of racial uplift as a tenet for Black women. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the African American community began using the term "ladies" to describe Black women—not as it was applied to white women of leisure—but as someone who "assumed a responsibility for the problems of the society at large, but just her own family's needs." Black Victorian women were encouraged to become educated specifically to help uplift their race.[52] While they were expected to defer to their husbands, it was also understood that they would be more outspoken than white Victorian women. Carlson highlights that this bluntness "frequently won community approval…especially when such a characteristic was directed toward achieving 'racial uplift.'" In summary, the Black Victorian woman was a "wife and mother, but she could also assume other roles, such as schoolteacher, social activist, and businesswoman, among others."[53] They did not sacrifice their status as "True Women" to become active leaders in their community; instead, embracing these roles demonstrated their adherence to the Cult of Domesticity.

In this context, the women of TMC actively engage with the mosque and their community by carving out leadership roles for themselves. African American Muslim women are equal counterparts to Muslim men and occupy leadership roles in both secular and sacred spheres. Women serve on boards and regularly contribute to decision-making at The Muslim Center. They also choose the extent to which they lead within their family units. The women on the TMC board undoubtedly see themselves as leaders in their homes and are recognized by community members as leaders within the mosque.

The definition of a leader needs to be broadened to include those who are spokespersons for an establishment *and* those who work behind the scenes to promote a community's social, economic, spiritual, and political uplift. The African American Muslim women at TMC are not viewed as a supporting cast. They run nearly all the programming, including teaching children the Quran, leading community outreach efforts, and managing the soup kitchen and food pantry. They significantly contribute to the community's direction and vitality, embodying the true strength of this community.

The soup kitchen and food pantry at The Muslim Center are open every Saturday from noon to 1:30 pm, providing hot meals and free groceries to those in need. The food pantry is stocked with items donated by Forgotten Harvest. This food rescue organization collects surplus food from approximately 800 donors and delivers it to charities, food pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens in and around Detroit. The Muslim Center is one of the recipients of these donations, allowing them to distribute thousands of food items each week, including canned goods, bread, beef, chicken, desserts, fruits, and vegetables. After collecting as many items as they need, people gather in the gymnasium for a hot meal provided by the soup kitchen.

The soup kitchen serves anywhere from several dozen to over a hundred people, especially during the pandemic. The cooks, all women, prepare various hot meals, including fried chicken, spaghetti, whiting, yellow rice, salads, and glazed carrots, among other dishes. These women have significant autonomy in deciding what to prepare each week. The success of the soup kitchen and the food pantry is primarily attributed to the leadership of Davine El-Amin. Her guidance ensures that the operations run smoothly, effectively meeting the community's needs and providing vital support during challenging times, which is the embodiment of racial uplift.

El-Amin, who co-chairs The Muslim Center's food pantry and serves as the board secretary, is active in various aspects of the kitchen's operations. She determines the kitchen staff, decides what foods will be prepared,

maintains drivers for the Meals on Wheels program, and selects the most efficient delivery routes. These delivery routes span over twenty miles to places like Hamtramck and Westland, ensuring that anyone facing food insecurity who cannot make it to the facility still receives a meal. When there is a shortage of drivers, El-Amin seeks out volunteers to fill the gaps or makes the trips herself. Her effective leadership ensures that everyone who requests meals receives deliveries. El-Amin's success is mainly due to her commanding disposition and her commitment to improving the community around her.

Leadership roles are a defining feature of The Muslim Center. W. Deen Muhammad's mosques have progressively included women in leadership roles, resulting in high female involvement. Within four months of Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, W. Deen Muhammad appointed the first woman to head Harlem Temple No. 7. That same year, he also abolished the Muslim Girl Training (MGT) program, a Nation of Islam initiative that taught women domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, personal hygiene, and their roles in Muslim life and their communities. Muhammed rejected MGT's narrow focus on the domestic realm, instead celebrating women's unique capacities and insights as mothers in a broader societal context. W. Deen Muhammad's commitment to inclusion was further demonstrated in 2008 when he spoke at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, stating:

> In the time of Muhammad the Prophet, women scholars were recognized, and many of the women scholars were the teachers of the imams. Aisha [a wife of the Prophet] was one of them, as the sister who asked me to respond knows. She wants me to tell you that women were respected for their education, for their knowledge, for their character, for their spirituality, for their moral excellence, etc. And the most pious religious leaders of the men respected Aisha so much that when she spoke, they would all remain quiet and they would listen for wisdom from her mouth.[54]

Women in W. Deen Muhammad's mosques have always been at the forefront of religious community inclusion and racial uplift. They follow the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and take inspiration from the women in the Prophet's community.

Muslim congregants unanimously agreed that TMC would not be as successful without its women's leadership in various programming. When asked whether the center would thrive without women's involvement, Tia stated, "Oh, most definitely not!" Mohammad characterized the role of women at the center as "strong," saying that women "have a major role in keeping The Muslim Center going." Omar added, "When you look at Islam as a whole, as far as the African American experience of Muslims that I have seen in Detroit... the African American women always play a leadership role." The notion of leadership stood out to me; Omar followed up, stating, "I'm actually on the Shura Board here at The Muslim Center and have been for about 10-11 years now. It's three women on the board here. You know what I mean?... So they have an equal share in making the rules around here."[55] Three of the six total board members at The Muslim Center are African American women who ensure women's issues remain a top priority.

The Shura Board is the governing body that organizes the mosque's affairs. "Shura" derives from *ash-shura*, an Arabic word that roughly means "consultation." The concept of having a governing body for a community of Muslims is rooted in the Quran, which states: "Those who hearken to their Lord and establish regular Prayer, who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation..."[56] The purpose of the Shura Board is to have a committee of people who meet to decide the mosque's direction, future programming, and day-to-day affairs, involving those most affected by these decisions. The goal is to democratize decision-making by having a diverse group representing the larger congregation's best interests. As such, TMC does not just afford women token roles in its governing body; it grants them an equal share in the governance.

Women's leadership is palpable at the center, even to those who are not regular attendees. During one of my interviews, Omar recounted a story that highlights how leadership at this mosque challenges others' preconceived notions about women's leadership roles. He stated:

> One of the reasons you'll see a lot of the men bypass The Muslim Center is because they used to call The Muslim Center 'the woman's mosque' because the women have a lot of input here as opposed to if you go to one of the other [immigrant] mosques. You don't see women having the type of input they have in here. So women get an equal share of thinking around here. They aren't limited to 'you just a woman.'[57]

Throughout African American history, women have been at the forefront of uplifting their communities through sustained effort. They have significantly contributed to the education of Black youth, the formation of social clubs, the creation and development of racial uplift programs, grassroots organizing, and the work of various publications. In the early nineteenth century, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois engaged in a public debate about the best type of education for Black people to achieve racial and social justice. Simultaneously, Nannie Helen Burroughs implemented both ideologies in her National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington,

DC.[58] During the Black Panther Party era, the majority of its rank-and-file membership were women who contributed to various programs and, in the absence of male leadership, stepped into leadership roles. For example, Elaine Brown led the organization from 1974-1977 when Huey P. Newton was absent.[59]

While Black women often did not represent the public face of social change movements, their contributions to racial uplift deserve recognition and honor as leaders in their own right. These women were foundational to the success of various organizations and movements, all while being wives, raising children, and maintaining their households. For instance, Elijah Muhammad left Clara Muhammad virtually a single mother of eight for over a decade during the Great Depression. In 1931, she pioneered the NOI's independent schools, which were established nationally by the 1950s. Despite homeschooling being illegal then, the NOI's first classes took place in Clara Muhammad's home, where she served as the first teacher.

Through her role as a mother, Clara influenced her son W. Deen Muhammed's progressive gender philosophy. He used the concept of "mothers to society" to discuss women's roles, honoring another of Clara Muhammad's significant contributions: the Muslim Girls Training and General Civilization Class (MGT). Clara Muhammad exemplified the feminine virtues instilled in MGT. Muhammed observed from his mother that women could contribute to larger society while fulfilling their roles as supportive wives and educated mothers. Clara Muhammad epitomized this ideal, making her a role model for women and men. Black Muslim women today draw from Clara's legacy as they shape their model of femininity and provide a clear example of community and racial uplift.

Black Muslim women at The Muslim Center mirror the historic dedication of Black Victorian women to a strong emphasis on racial uplift. Unlike their white middle-class counterparts, who were often restricted to the domestic sphere, Black women have historically prioritized education and community leadership to address broader societal issues. This commitment to racial uplift distinguishes the women at TMC, highlighting their unique contributions to their community and broader social justice efforts. They serve on the board of TMC, contribute to decision-making processes, manage essential programs like the soup kitchen, meals on wheels, and food pantry, and engage in teaching and community outreach. The women of TMC actively engage in programs that promote racial uplift, such as grassroots organizing, educational initiatives, and social advocacy. They understand that their achievements are not just personal milestones but vital tools for advancing their community's status and fighting systemic racism. The women at TMC illustrate how racial uplift is essential to their identity and mission, ensuring that their work in both domestic and public spheres drives meaningful change and uplifts the entire African American community.

I have argued that these Muslim women are not marginalized or oppressed followers of the faith but are leaders in their community, integrating African and African American cultural traditions with their belief system, making it distinct from other Muslim communities. I have countered preconceived notions of Muslim women's subservience and highlighted their leadership roles in both the community and the domestic sphere. According to a Pew Research Poll article from January 2019, African Americans account for about twenty percent of the Muslim population in the United States. However, discourse about what American Muslims want and believe typically centers on non-African Americans. Giving voice to African American Sunni women shifts the scholarship away from the male perspective and places women's experiences at the forefront.

It can be easy from a modern lens to view Victorian gender ideals as oppressive and limiting. However, these ideals were meant to acknowledge and crystallize women's critical roles in their families and communities. Without their piety, purity, domesticity, submissiveness, and dedication to racial uplift, the sweeping social movements that have fundamentally changed this nation would not have occurred. Women harnessed the power given to them under the Cult of Domesticity to occupy two seemingly incongruous spaces: private, submissive nurturers and public, assertive leaders for change.

African American Sunni women have similarly harnessed the power of Islam to navigate these dual roles effectively. They integrate their faith with African and African American cultural traditions, making their practice distinct from other Muslim communities. They redefine their roles within their religious and cultural contexts by emphasizing racial uplift. These women take on leadership roles within the mosque and community, actively participating in decision-making processes and managing essential programs. Their leadership extends beyond the domestic sphere, influencing social movements and community initiatives. African American Sunni women demonstrate that their roles are not confined to the household but extend to significant contributions in the broader societal context. This holistic approach ensures that their efforts are recognized as integral to the community's progress and well-being, illustrating the enduring relevance of Victorian ideals of domesticity and the power of faith to drive social change.

[1] https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/tt_debunking_misconceptions_0.pdf;
https://muslim.sg/articles/addressing-misconceptions-women-and-islam;
https://www.cairchicago.org/blog/blog/2012/02/myths-and-realities-about-muslim-women-part-i;
https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/five-things-you-need-to-know-about-women-in-islam-implications-for-advancing-

womens-rights-in-the-middle-east/;https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/myths-and-facts-about-muslim-people-and-islam.

[2] For more on the Cult of Domesticity see: Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly 18, 2 (1966): 151–74; Marlene LeGates, "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought," Eighteenth-Century Studies 10, 1 (1976): 21–39; Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," The Journal of American History 75, 1 (1988): 9–39; Linda M. Perkins, "The Impact of the 'Cult of True Womanhood' on the Education of Black Women," in Darlene Clark Hine (ed.), Black Women in United States History (16 vols; Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Co., 1990): III, 1066; Shirley J. Carlson, "Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era," The Journal of Negro History 77, 2 (1992): 61-73; Nancy Isenberg, "Second Thoughts on Gender and Women's History," American Studies 36, 1 (1995): 93–103; and Vicki Howard, "The Courtship Letters of an African American Couple: Race, Gender, Class, and the Cult of True Womanhood," The Southwestern Historical Quarterly 100, 1 (1996): 64-80.

[3] For example, three of the most widespread publications about the lives of African American Muslim women are Dawn-Marie Gibson and Jamillah Karim, *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Bayyinah Jeffries, *A Nation Can Rise No Higher Than Its Women: African American Muslim Women in the Movement for Black Self-Determination, 1950-1975* (Landham: Lexington Books, 2014); and Ula Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Only *Women of the Nation* addresses African American Sunni Muslim women's lives and experiences. Gibson and Karim's work adds a unique dimension to Black Muslim women's study by studying Sunni women alongside women in the Nation of Islam. Not only does she interview many women about their experiences, but they also become the narrative's driving force. However, Gibson and Karim's work did not focus on all Sunni women. Instead, it focused on "the voices of ex-Nation women who... have left the NOI for Sunni Islam but describe the Nation as an organization that bettered their lives." (1)

[4] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 1-2.

[5] Jamillah Karim's *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah* (New York: New York University Press, 2008) is primarily concerned with the relationship between African American Muslims and South Asian Muslim immigrants in Chicago and Atlanta, showing how the larger Islamic community creates a space for developing solidarity between these two groups by examining their shared struggle to overcome race, class, and gender inequality. Aminah McCloud's "African-American Muslim Women" in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, ed. Rosemary S. Keller and Rosemary R. Ruether (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) explores an Islamic community in Philadelphia, but it primarily focuses on how Sunni women converted to Islam. Finally, Carolyn Rouse's *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) offers an ethnographic study of Sunni women in Los Angeles. Rouse's primary concern is to explore issues of agency by exploring three avenues: (1) Quranic exegesis (interpretation), which requires knowledge of the Quran, Islamic history, Islamic jurisprudence, and Arabic, (2) adherence to the five pillars, (3) and personal growth through increased self-awareness.

[6] Sylvia Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 2.

[7] The Muslim Center: Mosque and Community Center opened its doors in 1985 as a Sunni mosque in the metro Detroit area to cater to African American Muslim converts. Some of the elder community members had previous affiliation with the NOI, but the preponderance of members of this community converted to Sunni Islam and had no previous affiliation with the NOI. It is located at the intersection of West Davison Street and Woodrow Wilson Boulevard in Detroit, Michigan. The center opened its doors to welcome a host of Muslims who resided in and around the Metro Detroit area. The Muslim Center offered a place to pray and a communal space of recreation, education, and community restoration. Today, The Muslim Center boasts many programs that cater to the community's sacred and secular needs-- providing a space of religious worship, social activism, and community uplift. This 5000 square-foot facility features a large prayer hall, a gymnasium, a multipurpose kitchen, several classrooms, and a halal jazz cafe. In addition, The Muslim Center provides services such as a clothing share, a soup kitchen, family counseling, job training, substance abuse programs, and a basketball team for the neighborhood youth while collaborating with other mosques and churches to meet community needs. The Muslim Center offers a unique opportunity to study a particular African American Muslim community's beliefs and practices in Detroit. To conduct this research, I used interviews, newspaper articles, observations, and fieldnotes to tell the story of the women of this community while situating their experiences within the larger context of African American Muslim practices. While these Muslim women are part of a larger imagined community of believers, they occupy a unique niche in Islamic Detroit's legacy that has remained underexplored.

[8] D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2012), 6.

[9] For further information about the interviews and methodology, refer to "Islam in Black Detroit: A Case Study," PhD diss., (Michigan State University, 2021).

[10] Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood," 152.

[11] Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, 2 (1976): 187–205.

[12] Carlson, "Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era," 62.

[13] Karim, *American Muslim Women*, 172.

[14] Juliane Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More Than a Prayer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 128.

[15] Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism*, 129.

[16] Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 175. Emphasis mine.

[17] Karim, *American Muslim Women*, 173.

[18] Jajuan Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit: A Case Study," PhD diss., (Michigan State University, 2021), 93.

[19] Karim, *American Muslim Women*, 171.

[20] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 210.

[21] Karen Leonard, *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2003), 78.

[22] W. Deen Muhammed, son of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam from 1933 to 1975. Although TMC is not a former NOI mosque, Muhammad's gender changes inspired people of TMC to ensure that mosque was grounded in opportunities for women.

[23] Sarah Sayeed, Aisah Al-Adawiya, and Ihsan Bagby, "The American Mosque 2011: Women and the American Mosque," (Report by the Islamic Society of North America, 2013) https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-American-Mosque-Report-3-1.pdf?x46312.

[24] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 93.

[25] *The Young Lady's Book* (New York, 1830), American edition, 28.

[26] George Burnap, *The Sphere and Duties of Woman* (5th ed, Baltimore, 1854), 47.

[27] "A Submissive Mother," *The Ladies' Parlor Companion: A Collection of Scattered Fragments and Literary Gems* (New York, 1852), 358. For more on women's domestic and submissive roles see Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood."

[28] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 98.

[29] While there are several verses in the Quran that tells Muslims to be kind to their parents (17:23-24; 29:8; 31:14-15), it is explicit about the love and respect that should be accorded to one's mother because she is the one who "carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship" (Quran 46:15). This notion of respecting one's mother is also rooted in the prophetic tradition. One of the most often-cited hadith narrations that demonstrates that the mother, in Islam, is held in the highest esteem is as follows: "A man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good treatment? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your father" (Sahih Muslim Book 32, No. 6181).

[30] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 108.

[31] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 108.

[32] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 109.

[33] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 109.

[34] Carlson, "Black Ideals of Womanhood," 62.

[35] Howard, "The Courtship Letters," 77.

[36] Delores Aldridge, "African-American Women in the Economic Marketplace: A Continuing Struggle" in *Journal of Black Studies*, 20, no. 2 (1989): 133-134.

[37] Quran 4:34.

[38] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 103.

[39] Amina McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 158.

[40] "Farewell Sermon The Last Sermon of Muhammad delivered on the Ninth Day of Dhul Hijjah 10 A.H (c. 630 AD)."

[41] Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 150.

[42] Quran 4:7; 4:20; 3:195; 4:19; 16:97; and 16:59-60.

[43] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 110.

[44] Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 40.

[45] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 110.

[46] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 111.

[47] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 111.

[48] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 112.

[49] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy.*

[50] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 112-113.

[51] Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 158.

[52] Howard, "The Courtship Letters," 77-78.

[53] Carlson, "Black Ideals of Womanhood," 62.

[54] Theological Center in Atlanta in 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wG6kjh6yxZk.

[55] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 96-97.

[56] Quran 42:38.

[57] Maefield, "Islam in Black Detroit," 97-98.

[58] Sarah D. Bair, "Educating Black Girls in the Early 20th Century: The Pioneering Work of Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879-1961)" in *Theory & Research in Social Education* 36 (2008): 9-35. During Marcus Garvey's role as leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, he relied heavily on his wife, Amy Jacques Garvey. She was one of the main contributors to the successes of the movement. While the Montgomery Bus Boycott's success is often attributed to E.D. Nixon and Martin Luther King, Joann Robinson played an integral role in the campaign by circulating flyers and convincing women, the primary bus riders, to stay off the busses making the boycott successful.

[59] Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992). Much of the Black Lives Matter movement's success can be attributed to Black women's participation.