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Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Turning Points: American Muslims After 9/11

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Abstract:

This mini-unit serves as the coda to a unit on September 11th in a senior high school elective history course entitled “A History of Your Lifetime.” It is designed for use at an Orthodox Jewish high school in New Jersey. Students will look at the lived experience of American Muslims in the wake of the September 11th attacks to assess the utility of that date as a turning point, and then reflect on the lives of American Muslims today.

Essential Questions:

Was September 11th a turning point for American Muslims? How do American Muslims’ diverse experiences in the wake of the attacks complicate the narratives of unity and patriotism established in the first portion of the unit? Has much changed for American Muslims over the course of students’ own lifetimes?

Learning Goals:

Content skills: source analysis and criticism, periodization, continuity and change over time

Human skills: empathy, cross-cultural understanding

Procedure:

Days 1 and 2:

Students begin creating a [learning log](#) for this unit. Guiding questions include:

- What do you know about Islam/American Muslims?
- What images, personal experiences, media inform your knowledge?
- What would you like to know about Islam/American Muslims?
- This topic reminds me of...

After spending half a period working on their learning logs, students are presented with a variety of sources relating to the experience of American Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11, including:

- [Living in America as a Muslim after 9/11: Poll Trends 2001-2007, Final Report to Human Factors/Behavioral Sciences Division, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#)
- [Shouting Across the Divide: A Muslim woman persuades her husband that their family would be happier if they left the West Bank and moved to America. They do, and things are good...until September 11. After that, the elementary school their daughter goes to begins using a textbook that says Muslims want to kill Christians.](#)
- Associating with the "Enemy": Defending the Rights of Muslims in Post-9/11 America. Author(s): Matthew H. Simmons, Source: *Litigation*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Prejudice (Spring 2003), pp. 31-37, 71
- Historical Events and Spaces of Hate: Hate Crimes against Arabs and Muslims in Post-9/11 America. Author(s): Ilir Disha, James C. Cavendish and Ryan D. King. Source: *Social Problems*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (February 2011), pp. 21-46
- "Bands of Others"? Attitudes toward Muslims in Contemporary American Society. Kerem Ozan Kalkan, Geoffrey C. Layman and Eric M. Uslaner. *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Jul., 2009), pp. 847-862
- [Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans after 9/11](#), Lori Peek
- [Explaining 9/11 to a Muslim Child](#)

Over the course of the next period, students will consult at least 3 sources, and continue adding to their learning log, answering a new set of questions:

- Does this source change my initial impressions?
- Does this source answer any of my questions?
- What would I like to ask the author?

- What is the perspective of the author? What is the genre of the source? Who is the intended audience?
- Was and in what ways was September 11th a turning point for American Muslims? Did it impact the subjects' practice? Sense of belonging? Feeling of connection to America or Islam?

Day 3:

Students spend the day using the [Pluralism Project's A Call to Prayer case study](#) to think about American Muslims and American civil society in the years since 9/11. After, they contribute to their learning logs, answering the following questions:

To what extent did the events of September 11, 2001 affect the case in Hamtramck in 2004? Was Islam incidental or instrumental to the controversy? Would the case be different if it were a synagogue?

Day 4:

Students watch the Pew Research Center's 2018 film "[Being Muslim in America](#)", and then select an episode from the [See Something, Say Something](#) podcast. They will continue adding to their learning logs, answering:

- How much has changed for American Muslims since 9/11?
- What has stayed the same?
- What about life for American Muslims seems familiar to you? What is different?
- How does learning about contemporary American Muslims challenge or confirm your prior knowledge?

Day 5: Classroom panel discussion

Assessment

Students write a 2-3 page reflection on the unit, commenting on how their prior opinions were confirmed or disabused, and discussing the perspectives of the speakers on the panel.

For information about the Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching on religious diversity, see: www.religiousworldsnyc.org.