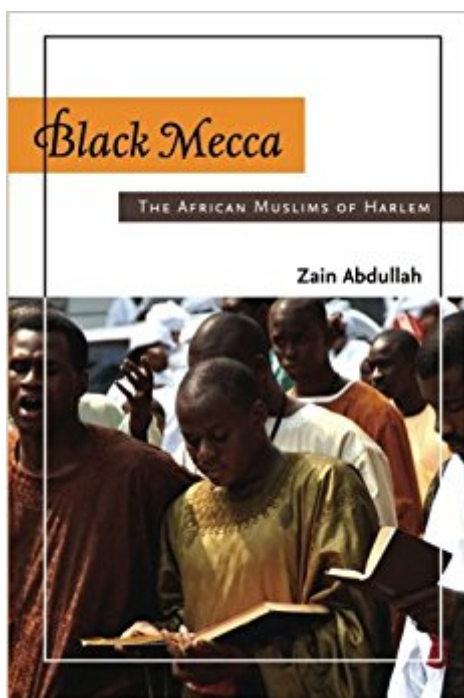


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# Black Mecca: The African Muslims Of Harlem



## Synopsis

The changes to U.S. immigration law that were instituted in 1965 have led to an influx of West African immigrants to New York, creating an enclave Harlem residents now call "Little Africa." These immigrants are immediately recognizable as African in their wide-sleeved robes and tasseled hats, but most native-born members of the community are unaware of the crucial role Islam plays in immigrants' lives. Zain Abdullah takes us inside the lives of these new immigrants and shows how they deal with being a double minority in a country where both blacks and Muslims are stigmatized. Dealing with this dual identity, Abdullah discovers, is extraordinarily complex. Some longtime residents embrace these immigrants and see their arrival as an opportunity to reclaim their African heritage, while others see the immigrants as scornful invaders. In turn, African immigrants often take a particularly harsh view of their new neighbors, buying into the worst stereotypes about American-born blacks being lazy and incorrigible. And while there has long been a large Muslim presence in Harlem, and residents often see Islam as a force for social good, African-born Muslims see their Islamic identity disregarded by most of their neighbors. Abdullah weaves together the stories of these African Muslims to paint a fascinating portrait of a community's efforts to carve out space for itself in a new country.

## Book Information

Paperback: 306 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; Reprint edition (July 1, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199329281

ISBN-13: 978-0199329281

Product Dimensions: 9 x 0.8 x 6.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #606,746 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > Mecca](#) #129 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > Rituals & Practice](#) #292 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies > Islam](#)

## Customer Reviews

"Black Mecca is a masterful example of thick ethnography... Combines great storytelling with deep insights... a must read for students of American Islam." --Islamic Africa  
"Black Mecca is an immensely readable book that is a must for those with a keen interest in religion and culture. Zain

Abdullah's tenacity, tact, and knowledge of Islam open up the world and lives of individuals and communities who are creating a space for themselves in a new country."--Black Theology "Brilliantly subtle.... does a masterful job humanizing these subjects and rendering their lives and thoughts in nuanced and memorable ways."--Sociology of Religion "Compelling and readable. . . Abdullah is a skilled writer, and the reader moves from one inviting chapter to the next as if wandering through the city with a close friend, stopping to chat with passersby. . . . A thoughtful analysis of how African Muslims have become a vital part of Harlem social life."--American Anthropologist "Intermingling ethnographic research with good storytelling and captivating interviews, Black Mecca is electrifying. Abdullah opens up the community and its individuals in ways I could not have imagined. We visit their homes, dine with them, and stay up late into the night at celebrations. We become intimate with longing, tragedy, uncertainty, loss, and triumph. This is a must-read for students of immigration, anthropology, religion, and culture." --Aminah Beverly McCloud, Director, Islamic World Studies, DePaul University "Skillfully combining engaging narrative with insightful analysis, Zain Abdullah has given us a revelatory book, Black Mecca, which tells the compelling story of African Muslims in New York City. In Black Mecca the voices of African Americans and African Muslims are loud, clear, and passionate. Abdullah chronicles the recent evolution of social life in Harlem, a fluid multicultural urban scene in which the proximity of African Muslims and African Americans has triggered both broad cross-cultural awareness and profound cultural misunderstanding, both bonding and resentment. By capturing this ever-changing complexity, Black Mecca makes a major contribution to urban and religious studies, and powerfully illuminates the nuances of social and religious life in contemporary urban America." --Paul Stoller, author of Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City "Zain Abdullah's Black Mecca is an innovative, first-rate ethnography. Its engaging narrative allows African Muslim immigrants in Harlem to speak for themselves, enabling readers to understand the nature and richness of their experience. Abdullah's writing style is accessible, and his analysis is both critical and sophisticated. At a time when Muslim Americans have come under scrutiny, Black Mecca offers a well-rounded argument for the significant contributions they make to American public life." --Jacob K. Olupona, Professor of African Religious Traditions, Harvard Divinity School "Situated at the intersection of race studies, anthropology, and Islamic studies, this book is significant beyond its role as a study of American Muslims in advancing readers' understanding of migration, religious identities, and globalization through the lives of people in this particular community. . . Highly recommended."--CHOICE "One of the greatest strengths of Black Mecca is the careful attention Abdullah pays to relationships between African Muslim and African Americans in Harlem....Abdullah is one of the rare academic writers who can present a sophisticated analysis

in a highly engaging manner..."--Erin E. Stiles, University of Nevada, Reno "Abdullah weaves these topics into a dense and vivid portrait of what he describes as a new 'Blues people' immersed in narratives of suffering, survival, and hope. He skillfully avoids one-sided representations and allows himself to consider different angles for each encounter he describes. The book is significant...advancing our understanding of migration through the lives of people in this particular community."-- Carolyn Wilcox, CHOICE "I salute D. Abdullah's effort to identify a very visible community in Harlem with poise and respect in authoring 'Black Mecca'...It's truly a superb and scholarly gem. I enjoyed reading, and suggest that you do also, and that's 'As I See It.'"--Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, The Chronicle "This book is a must read for individuals seeking to understand how immigrants deal with struggles as group, and also as a means of understanding the tension that occurs in communities where immigrants have begun to transform the cultural space."--Adilah S. Muhammad, Last Prophet"...this book is significant beyond its role as a study of American Muslims in advancing readers'...highly recommended."--CHOICE "This approach reveals their longings, tragedies, uncertainties, losses, and triumphs, as well as the significant contributions they have (and continue to) made America's public life." "Islamic Horizons" Zain Abdullah aims to create a voice with his book...."--Priscilla Ward, The Temple News "Black Mecca is, above all, a story of unity...."--Diego Ortiz, The Rutgers Observer "...brilliant subtle book."--John L. Jackson Jr., University of Pennsylvania "[Abdullah] does a masterful job humanizing these subjects and rendering their lives and thoughts in nuanced memorable ways."--Sociology of Religion "[N]oteworthy is [Abdullah's] investigation of courtship, marriage, and family formation for the roles that these processes play in relationships within Harlem's West African community and beyond it."--Social Service Review "Abdullah's monograph presents a compelling exploration of the experiences of West African Muslim immigrants in Harlem...Abdullah's organization provides a straightforward framework for exploring the various ways in which immigrants experience, adapt to, and influence Harlem."--The Journal of African American History "Black Mecca undoubtedly is a new contribution to the literature on Islam in America...Black Mecca is a must-read book for any scholar dealing with issues, roles, and the contributions of Muslim immigrants in the United States."--The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences "Zain Abdullah's Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem is a fine example of a high-quality ethnography and fieldwork. It is rare for an academic book to be written in such a way that it keeps its reader's attention through the whole volume, but Abdullah's descriptions and analyses come close to an academic cliff-hanger, and his engagement and knowledge are intriguing and stimulating...a book one must read. Moreover, it can also be read as a manual for how to write an ethnography and conduct fieldwork, a skill that is very hard to learn. From these

points of view, Abdullah's fine work is a true inspiration and a joy to read."--Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review "This book is a wonderful teaching tool at undergraduate and graduate levels. Not only does it introduce its audience to relatively new scholarly subjects, African and African-American Islam, but also it evocatively and clearly describes immigrant experiences by tacking between detailed ethnography and concise summaries of broader theoretical and theological discussions."--Journal of Islamic Law and Culture "A compelling exploration of the experiences of West African Muslim immigrants in Harlem...Abdullah's topical organization provides a straightforward framework for exploring the various ways in which immigrants experience, adapt to, and influence Harlem."--The Journal of African American History

Zain Abdullah holds a doctorate in cultural anthropology. He is Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and an associate faculty member in the Department of Geography and Urban Studies at Temple University. He works in film and photography, and serves on the Religion and Migration Consultation committee for the American Academy of Religion.

Starting in the 1960s through September 2011, the palate of the American public has been over-saturated with predominately two types of Islamic ideologies: the Nation of Islam and the Arab cultural Islam. Black Mecca, written by Dr. Zain Abdullah, gives insight into a wider, more robust pictorial of the Islamic religion. Black Mecca gives a firsthand account of present day life for both African immigrants and Afro Americans in the Harlem community. This documented account of the personal lives and behind the scenes views of their daily challenges gives the reader a preview of what will become the new Harlem community. The new Harlem renaissance will be a mixture of this multicultural, linguistic, and bicoastal dynamic outlined in the pages of this great work, Black Mecca. I advise all educators, ethnic historians, and anyone else interested in where American culture is headed to read this book.

Black Mecca gave an interesting perspective on how African Immigrant Muslims perceive America to be. The sacrifices, struggle's and faith of the African Muslims are well documented by Dr. Abdullah. The American Dream at times was/is a nightmare. But the dream is more promising than the perception of home. The book is a great read in helping one to understand the importance of culture, traditions, faith and community of immigrant African Muslims trying to be successful in Harlem USA.

Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem, is a very interesting and intimate look inside an African Muslims community. Dr. Abdullah's book welcomed me into a world within a world. It took me on a compelling journey through the lives of several individuals. I became personally connected to them while sharing their everyday blessings, shortcomings and some of their cultural traditions. In the second chapter, I found myself in a sixty-foot, single-cabin catamaran on a journey across the Atlantic with fourteen Senegalese men bound for New York. I really enjoyed reading this book and found it hard to put down once I started the journey.

Excellent reader! Two thumbs up! Thought provoking and very insightful. Taking you on a journey into a captivating and fascinating look into the the rich and variegated lives of the Senegalese community. Wajeedah Mohammad

I found this book a very enlightening read, very informational and elevating. I now have a clearer perspective on African Muslims migrants and their struggles. The author was just sensational with his flare to draw you into each conversation and each person personal journey. I especially appreciated the soulfulness that was shared by the author from start to finish.

This book has a wealth of information pertaining to the diaspora of African Muslims in Harlem. I would recommend this book to any aspiring historian.

I used this book as a reference in a group project for school.

Black Mecca -Is a captivating and fascinating look into the the rich and variegated lives of the Senegalese community of Harlem. Dr. Abdullah true to his Anthropological erudition and pedagogical professionalism: provides an intimate account and insider's perspective on the complexity, spirituality, and continental duality of this ethnic enclave and their cultural and religious juxtaposition with the long suffering non-immigrant 'Black Community' of Harlem; whose subculture, linguistic and sartorial expressionism has defined the concept of 'blackness' and the perception of Harlem to white Americans, Europeans and Asians for decades. For anyone who believes or thinks that the 'Black community' of Harlem is culturally monolithic, spiritually and religiously rooted in Judeo-Christian beliefs and practices then reading Black Mecca is a must!! highly recommend Dr. Abdullah's book to elementary, high school teachers and college professors that are teaching courses on contemporary black studies and urban sociology to incorporate Black Mecca into their lesson plans and required

reading list.

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