

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

June 23, 2020

Proclaim July as Muslim American Heritage Month in Los Angeles County

More than 69,000 Muslim Americans comprise one of the ten largest religious groups in Los Angeles County (County), many of whom practice their faith in 59 mosques throughout the County, according to a survey by the Glenmary Research Center. With roots in 77 different countries, and identifying racially as white, black, Asian, and Arab in roughly equal proportions, American Muslims are an extremely diverse population. In addition, more than half were born in the United States (U.S.), and 70 percent of those who immigrated are citizens. Many boldly pursue the American dream and contribute to the nation’s economy as business owners and entrepreneurs, including Pakistan-born billionaire Shahid Khan, owner of the \$4.9 billion auto-parts company Flex-N-Gate; physicians, of which Muslim Americans comprise five percent of the nation’s total; and many other roles and professions. In 2010, Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide Inc. estimated the consumer buying power of American Muslims at more than \$170 billion.

Their service to community and country is often motivated by the values of their faith – care, compassion, and concern for humankind, major themes found in the Quran. Since the beginning of American history, Bampett Muhammad and Yusuf Ben Ali served under the command of General George Washington in the American Revolutionary War. Individuals like Malcolm X and Keith Ellison helped lead the American civil rights movement, advocating for communities to overcome the various forms of discrimination that define the post-slavery struggle. Public servants like Farah Pandith served in the

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Bush and Obama administrations by building relationships with Muslim communities in troubled areas of the world and protecting this nation's security.

Muslim American contributions to arts, culture, science, engineering, and medicine have inspired, expanded collective understanding, and enhanced the quality of life for all living in the U.S. and throughout the globe. Syrian immigrant Ernest Hamwi's invention of the ice cream cone is a practical confection with a near ubiquitous presence in American life. Muhammad Ali, three-time World Heavyweight Boxing Champion, and Los Angeles' home teams' basketball stars Shaquille O'Neal and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar thrilled and entertained fans around the world. Several famous rappers exposed their fans to Islam, including Yasiin Bey (Mos Def); T-Pain; Nas; Lupe Fiasco; Ice Cube; Busta Rhymes; and Rakim Allah (also known as William Griffin). Pakistani-born neurosurgeon Ayub Ommaya's invention of the intraventricular catheter system provides chemotherapy to treat brain tumors. Bangladeshi-American Fazlur Rahman Khan left his mark on America's cityscapes by pioneering a new structural system of frame tubes used to construct iconic buildings like the World Trade Center in New York City, the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in Minneapolis, and the Willis "Sears" Tower in Chicago.

Despite their contributions to and participation in mainstream American life, anti-Muslim fears and hatred have left Muslim Americans vulnerable to profiling, harassment, and violence, especially following high-profile incidents. A 2016 Pew Research survey contains concerning findings about the public's opinion towards Muslim Americans, including that 44 percent of respondents in the U.S. agreed that "there is a natural conflict between Islam and democracy." After the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, the Arab American Institute reported more than 200 serious hate crimes against Arab Americans and American Muslims, even though none of the perpetrators identified as Muslim. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, hate crimes against people of Middle Eastern descent increased by 324 percent (including 188 reported crimes in the County). Despite an overall decrease since that time, Muslims, South Asians, and Middle Easterners still report harassment, racial/religious profiling, and discrimination, according to the 2018 Hate Crimes Report by the County's Human Relations Commission. However, the recent high-profile attacks on

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two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019, which claimed 51 lives and injured 49 individuals, has renewed fears of anti-Muslim violence.

Due to fears of the recent rise of anti-Muslim attitudes and official rhetoric, community leaders are concerned about depressed participation by Muslim residents in the U.S. Census, many of whom already live in hard-to-count Census tracts. A report by the Census Policy Advocacy Network finds that the California Muslim community may be reluctant to participate in activities like the Census that could be used as a registry. As part of its efforts to ensure participation, the County is working to provide culturally competent information and reassure residents that all personal information is confidential and used only to produce statistics. In addition, the Census does not collect information on a person's religious affiliation. To ensure the equitable distribution of resources, it is critical that all County residents participate in the [2020 U.S. Census](#).

In recognition of Muslim American Heritage Month, the [County Library](#) has provided books, eBooks, and other resources to give kids and adults an opportunity to learn about the Muslim American experience and culture.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Proclaim the month of July 2020 as "Muslim American Heritage Month" throughout Los Angeles County to celebrate and raise awareness of the contributions and rich history of Muslim Americans throughout the nation; and encourage Muslim Americans and all County residents to complete the 2020 United States Census Questionnaire, to ensure equitable distribution of resources.

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