

## SECTION 2

### *The American Muslim Community*

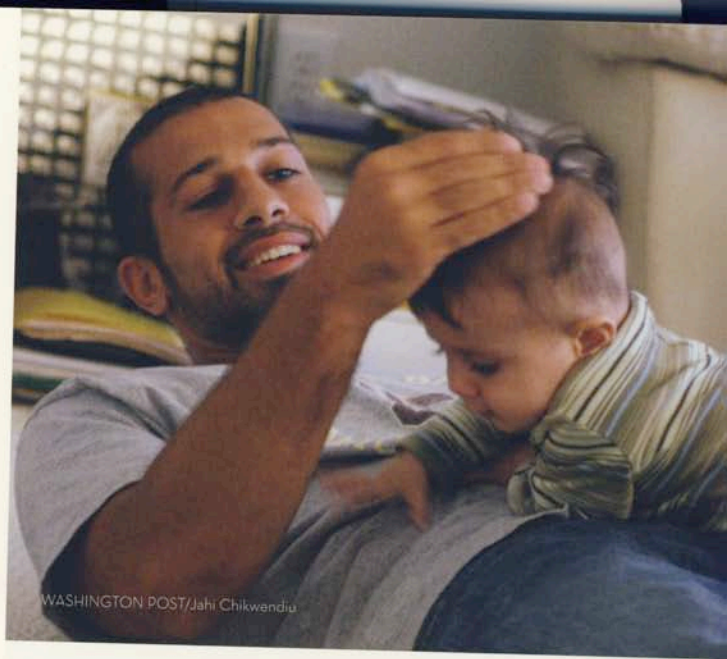
The American Muslim community is as diverse and dynamic as any in the Muslim world, representing an array of cultures, professions and ideologies. Although no official numbers exist, various studies estimate that there are between three and seven million Muslims in the United States. Six to seven million is the most commonly cited figure.

#### HISTORY

Muslims can trace their roots in American history back to colonial times when they were among the captives brought from Africa. Some historians estimate that some 20 percent of enslaved Africans were Muslims; however, since most Muslims were not permitted to openly practice their faith or were forced to convert to Christianity, few historical accounts exist today of their legacy.

One record of an enslaved Muslim is the story of Omar ibn Said, a Muslim scholar and trader from Futa Toro in Western Africa (present day Senegal) who was enslaved in 1807. Originally brought to Charleston, S.C., Said escaped four years later only to be recaptured and imprisoned in North Carolina.

According to North Carolina scholars, Said used coals that he found in his cell to write Arabic script on the jailhouse wall. When people learned of his abilities, he was sold to James Owen, the brother of North Carolina Governor John Owen for \$900. Today, an Arabic Bible that Said owned is housed in the library of Davidson College



Basim Hawa and his son, Hamza Hawa (6 months), at their home in Sterling, Va. Basim was born and raised in the U.S., and he became a more devout Muslim after making the Hajj with Imam Magid of the mosque Basim regularly attends.

in Davidson, North Carolina. The stories of many other African Muslims can be found in books and museums across the country.

The initial involuntary African migration was followed in the 19th century by Muslim immigrants and the political mobilization of the African-American community. Immigration records indicate that, while emigration from the Muslim world was constant in the first half of the century, the number increased rapidly after 1965 when Congress loosened restrictions on immigration laws by abandoning racial and national origin quotas. Most immigrants who came during this time were from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa.

During the civil rights era, high-profile Muslims like Malcolm X brought a lot of media attention to Islam in America. The Nation of Islam's message of black self-awareness and self-sufficiency was very popular among African-Americans who were struggling under racial oppression. Years later, when some of the Nation's most recognized spokespeople denounced many of its black separatist teachings, most African-American Muslims left to join the mainstream Muslim community.