



Calls to Action: Countering Internalized Racism – September 9, 2020 Summary and Timestamp of Conversation

Speakers were asked to comment on what we need to do in Muslim American communities to counter intra-Muslim racism.

Outline of Speakers:

Maha Elgenaidi – 00:00 (Introduction)

Dr. Jamilla Karim – 0:07:34

Imam Zaid Shakir – 0:18:16

Imam Faheem Shuaibe – 0:28:24

Dr. Mansa Bilal King – 0:40:28

Imam Abu Qadir – 0:52:43

Imam Muhammad Ali – 1:08:48

Ameena Jandali – 1:25:19

Ishaq Pathan – 1:31:50

Rahimeh Ramezany – 1:35:53

Transcript:

[0:0] **Maha:** Greetings of peace and *salam alaykum* everyone for joining us on this webinar. Welcome to our final webinar of the series on African American Muslims and intra-Muslim racism. To quickly review where we're at: in July, in response to Black Lives Matter protests, Islamic Networks Group, or ING as we're known, which ordinarily does work in education and community engagement to counter Islamophobia and all forms of bigotry, looked inward at the Muslim American community from which we came and asked: *what have we done at ING to counter racism within our own ranks?* We looked at what we had to offer internally, and created this series:

- Our [first](#) webinar on July 15 explored the history of Islam in America, which began with enslaved Muslim Africans.
- Our [second](#) webinar on July 29 explored some of the institutions and thought leaders, both men and women, of African American Muslims today.
- Our [third](#) webinar on August 12 introduced the topic of racism in the US, discussing how the concept of race was constructed, the process of racialization, and the impact that racism has had on various groups.

- Our [fourth](#) webinar on August 26 addressed intra-Muslim racism, based on a [blog post](#) I wrote that presented questions Muslim American communities need to ask themselves to determine whether they have a problem with racism against African American Muslims.
- And today, our [last](#) webinar will address what people can do to begin the process of addressing their own internalized anti-Black racism.

Racism is defined as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized, such as Black Americans in the United States. It's important to recognize that actions that disadvantage people because of their skin color are racist, whether intentionally so or not.

Now I know that this is a very sensitive topic, because the vast majority of people, when asked whether they're racists or not, will insist *they are not*. I was one of them. Several years ago, I was accused of being a racist by a young, progressive Arab leader after I criticized a prominent Black speaker for his style of speaking that I felt was out of place in what I considered an academic setting. My immediate reaction to the charge of racism was very typical. I denied it vociferously and felt deeply angry with this Arab woman making the charge, and then proceeded to contact all my Black friends to get them to tell me that I wasn't a racist. And they obliged, because they're nice people. And then I went about proving to myself that I wasn't a racist by overcompensating in my interactions with Black Americans. The charge of being a racist deeply impacted me, especially because I do anti-Islamophobia work. But it wasn't until I read *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo that I understood what this Arab woman was saying to me. I was wrong in my criticism of the Black leader's style of speaking, and the woman who criticized me was absolutely right. I think everyone should read *White Fragility*, including Arab and South Asian Muslims.

However, just a few months ago, when, even after I had read several books and attended workshops on anti-racism, a Black leader described his experience of my racist attitudes at a meeting he had attended with me about 25 years ago; how do you think I reacted? I didn't react well. And it wasn't until I talked with the young people on staff at ING that I realized that, again, my reaction was all wrong and that I should have listened to and considered what the person was saying. I later apologized publicly to that person.

And so, brothers and sisters, anti-racism work is a work in progress. And we must be humble about that. I don't think one ever arrives at being completely non-racist, let alone anti-racist. What's important is our willingness to address racism in ourselves, and our organization if we lead one, as I do at ING. You have to have the right intentions and put in the sincere effort and time to learn how to be a non-racist and an anti-racist and basically be humble and open-minded when your racism is pointed out to you. Not an easy thing to

do, but it must be done for the sake of our children and the Muslim American community. It requires a lot of deprogramming of the racism we've all ingested living in America and, in my case, the Middle East.

So now let's turn to our guest speakers who will offer some insight on how to be anti-racist. I am going to begin with Dr. Jamillah Karim, former Professor of Religion at Spelman College; she is also author, speaker, and blogger with specialties in Islam and Muslims in the United States and in Islamic feminism.

0:07:34: Dr. Jamillah Karim: Thank you, Maha. First I'd like to thank you for sharing your vulnerability. You're modeling some of what I'm going to talk about. So right after 9/11, I was a Ph.D. student out in the research field in both Atlanta and Chicago, researching African American and Desi or South Asian Muslim communities. I was interviewing mostly women of both groups to understand how they saw Muslims internalizing and perpetuating racism, and I published this book, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class and Gender within the Umma* to present my findings.

In my conclusion, I offered insights on how we can come together and be the beloved community that Dr. Martin Luther King envisioned, a community of love and justice. So I am going to spend most of my time reading the last two pages of my conclusion. **"In a study of relations between immigrants and native-born Americans in Miami, the author found that newcomers and Americans successfully come together when:**

- **One, each accorded the other equal status and fair treatment rather than one waiting for the other to change;**
- **Two, both shared a sincere interest in some goal rather than engaging in interaction because someone said they should; and,**
- **Three, cooperation across groups was required to achieve the goal.**

"The **first condition**, that each accorded the other equal status and fair treatment, restates the Quranic ideal of *ta'araf*, that people come to know one another with respect. By upholding Quranic ideals of social justice in a common American context, which is civic engagement, American Muslims are positioned to meet the **second condition**, working toward a common goal. Worshiping in the mosque is another common activity that brings Muslims together, that is, when there is a deliberate choice to attend a mosque in a different ethnic space. And of course the common interest in changing the image of Islam and Muslims in popular culture often requires collaboration among different ethnic Muslims.

"Finally, the **third condition** is that all groups commit to understanding and cooperating with one another, is met once again in the *ta'araf* ideal, in that it requires a mutual understanding of one another. To these I would add the Quranic concept of *ihsan* as an essential component of changing race relations in the American *ummah* or American Muslim community. English words commonly used to convey the meaning of this

esteemed Quranic quality are excellence, goodness, and beauty.

“As stated earlier, the Quran commands both *adl* or justice and *ihsan* in our relations with others. What is the relationship between these two terms mentioned side by side in the Quran? According to Arabic lexicologists, excellence or beauty, *ihsan*, surpasses justice, because *ihsan* means giving more than one owes and taking less than is owed to one, whereas *adl* or justice means giving what one owes and taking what is owed to one. **In other words, Muslims' pursuit of justice should have an aesthetic.** Incorporating *ihsan* in our goal of improving intra-ummah race relations means applying forgiveness, mercy, and preference to others in the face of injustice. Correcting a wrong, in this case, racism, must not be compromised, but it requires that the wronged person forgive, make excuses for, and look for the good in the one who has committed the wrong. As one community activist in Chicago suggested, Muslims need to practice more the Islamic principle of *husn*, or good opinion, which means giving a fellow Muslim the benefit of the doubt. Here *husn* comes from the same Arabic root as *ihsan*.

About privileged immigrants, the activists notice, there are people who do things in secret, i.e., anonymously giving money and resources to inner city communities and families that we don't know about. Instead of cynicism, an attempt by African-Americans to see the sincerity and good effort of immigrants will help ease tensions between these groups. For a South Asian Muslim, acting with *ihsan* might mean humbly modifying her behavior if she has been told that she has somehow offended an African-American, even though she does not intuitively see her actions as harmful or prejudiced. She might make an effort to acknowledge that in many American Muslim spaces her status as a South Asian Muslim does in fact grant her privileges, ones that sometimes may alienate African Americans occupying the same space.

“To apply *ihsan* does not mean that we ignore an injustice or allow it to go unchecked; rather it means creating beautiful relations between people built on mercy and trust, so that as we confront sensitive issues of power and privilege in our communities, we are more likely to listen to one another, care about our future together, and work with one another for change.”

Reading this passage after all these years, I realized that this vision of a community of love and justice-- but the love outweighing the justice-- is the concept of **radical love** that I have been exploring lately. I define radical love as mind-dazzling love that pours out of loss. After all, we would not be here if not for George Floyd and the countless loss of Black lives.

Radical love is, in the midst of hardship, heartbreak, profound loss, hunger, or poverty--in the midst of any of that-- moving in a way where your only concern is Allah seeing you because it is only Allah's love that you desire. We cannot be the beloved community unless our hearts are totally for Allah, because the

character traits required-- forgiveness, mercy, justice, generosity, patience, courage-- cannot be achieved unless our aspiration is God; we cannot fight systemic racism unless our aspiration is to Allah, because so often we will have to do work that is only seen by Allah, recognized by Allah, and lifted by Allah. This is why the *ansar* of Medina showed radical brother- and sisterhood, because they had the Messenger of Allah in their midst and their eyes were on Allah. And I end on a verse referring to that time: "He"--or God—"is the one who supported you"--speaking to the Prophet SAW—"with his help and with the believers, and brought together their hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have brought their hearts together, but God brought them together. Indeed, He is exalted in might and wise". The radical love, the justice, requires our efforts, but the victory is Allah's. May Allah grant us victory.

0:18:16: Imam Zaid Shakir: OK. I've read something slightly different, I think. I interpreted the instructions I had as to talk about justice in the context of the *fitra* or the human nature, so what I'm going to do briefly is read from an article I wrote on the topic and then circle back to answer the immediate question, and I'm going to do all that in seven minutes, *inshallah*.

[Arabic] Muslims go further than merely embracing religion as a private concern. They argue that religion, while being subjectively affirmed by individual humans, has been instituted by God to protect five objective universals [Arabic]: religion itself, life, intellect, the family, and property; some add honor as a sixth universal.

Religion, due to its theocentric nature, might be the only universal many modern people find controversial in this set of universals. **Islam, however, acknowledges a non-theocentric foundation for justice. This source is a universal human nature or innate disposition, *fitra*, which allows humans to agree upon certain acceptable and unacceptable actions.** These actions can be known independently from revelation, which can be seen as affirming them. These twin sets of justice, revelation and human nature, are summarized in the following verse: "These are the ones who follow the messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find inscribed with them in the Torah and the Gospel. He commands for them what is right [Arabic] and forbids from them what is wrong [Arabic] and he makes lawful for them the *hushn* and prohibits from them impurities [Arabic]. He relieves them from the burden, the burden of oaths and strictures previously placed upon them. Therefore, those who believe in him reverence him, assist him, and follow the light sent down to him. These are the ones who succeed."

Most of the exegetes opine that what is right in the context of this verse is what is declared lawful by revelation but what is wrong is what revelation declares to be unlawful. This is the first foundation of justice and emphasized by Imam Shafi and others. Many exegetes posit that the wholesome and impure which are mentioned subsequently in the verse comprise respectively those things human nature finds agreeable, good,

and pleasurable, and those things it finds repulsive, bad, and despicable.

Human nature, therefore, is the second moral foundation of justice for Muslims. The renowned theologian and exegete [?] comments on the wholesome and impurities, after rejecting an interpretation that would render them synonymous with what is right and what is wrong mentioned in the verse; he says rather it is necessary to interpret what is intended as [?], as agreeable, beneficial things according to human nature. This is because engaging in them brings delight, which is a benefit, and the ruling in beneficial things is lawfulness. This verse indicates that the ruling that everything the soul finds agreeable and good and human nature finds delightful is lawfulness unless there's a detailed countervailing proof. Anything the soul finds vile and human nature finds filthy and to engage in which is a source of pain, which involves harm, is unlawful, because the ruling for harmful things is unlawfulness.

From this we can understand that there are **two laws behind the laws, revelation and the law of human nature or *fitra***. While the former is the ultimate arbiter for Muslims, the latter by itself leads to a set of universally recognized and morally acceptable actions. The universality of these actions is rooted in the innate disposition with which humans have been fashioned. We read in the Quran: "Orient your face towards religion in accord with your innate disposition. This is the nature of *fitra*, of God, upon which he has fashioned humanity. Let there be no alteration in the creation of God. That is the upright religion; however, most people realize it not."

Muslims view *fitra* as a disposition shared with all human beings, moving it beyond immediate religious considerations. Thus, understandable actions, such as compassion for infants and the defense of the helpless, can rightfully serve as the source of a social order wherein people may differ religiously, even philosophically, while possessing sufficient shared values to allow for the formation of a viable political community. That community is grounded in a common sense of justice that keeps its members loyal to the polity and committed to its perpetuity.

So the point is this: as Muslims religiously, we have many injunctions contained in revelation that push us to be just and equitable, and also as human beings in an unadulterated state there are many natural propensities that push us to support and affirm standards that are just.

Therefore, we have no excuse not to be totally committed to just relations between all members of our society, particularly those who have been historically oppressed--in the case of the African-American community, virtually the entire people enslaved and then quasi- liberated but in a de facto state continuing in slavery through Jim Crow and still struggling to overcome the vestiges of formal slavery in the vestiges of Jim Crow as they manifest themselves in the new Jim Crow and other measures.



So we as Muslims who are building our affair on these twin foundations have no excuse, no matter where we hail from, no matter what our national origin might be in this country, not to find ourselves on the side of those who have been historically oppressed, on the side of those who have been dehumanized and commodified, on the side of those who have consistently encountered barrier after barrier for full inclusion into our society; and those who would argue otherwise would have a difficult time explaining discrimination in housing, discrimination in small business loan grants, discrimination in the implementation of the New Deal, discrimination in privileges from the GI bill, whose privileges were denied African-American veterans after the Second World War, from home ownership, the greatest vehicle for wealth accumulation in 20th century American society, to incarceration rates, arrest rates, and disproportionate killings at the hands of law enforcement, and many other indicators of an unjust, unfair system.

So we have no excuse as Muslims, because if we were to argue the religion isn't clear about it, then we would have to make an argument also against human nature, and making those twin arguments would be extremely difficult. So may Allah bless us to be true to ourselves as human beings and to be true to ourselves as Muslims who follow the unlettered Prophet, who build our affair on the basis of the Quran. We have no excuse.

So may Allah reward this effort and *alhamdulillah*, it's really to me a very good thing that this series is going on over a period of time and is not just a knee-jerk response to things happening in the news cycle, such as the aforementioned killing of Mr. Floyd, which deserves a response--but many people who responded as long as it was in the news cycle have moved on as the news cycle moved on. But, *alhamdulillah*, ING and those participating in this effort have not moved on and are keeping it fresh in the consciousness of the people, and so may Allah give us *tawfiq* and Allah bless us, as we said, to live up to the ideals we hold as Muslims and to live up to the ideal embedded in us by our Lord.

0:28:24: Imam Faheem Shuaibe: *Bismillah.ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* [Arabic] Brothers and sisters, *assalam aleikum. Alhamdulillah*, along with others I join in saying I'm honored to be a part of this series and part of this project, part of this work, *alhamdulillah*. It is so vast I decided to just do something pretty simple and formulaic.

One is, the Quran tells us that everyone acts according to their own disposition, and Allah knows who it is that's best guided on the way, and that for reference's sake is 17th chapter and the 84th verse of the Quran. Where the verse says that everyone acts according to their *shakila* and this *shakila* is translated as "disposition," I also find it to also carry the meaning "socialization." **Everybody acts according to the way that**

they've been socialized.

So when we talk about human nature according to the Quran, the Quran is revealing to us how that nature actually operates, and so now we know that the debate between nurture and nature has been resolved: not either-or, it is both. So there is this nature-nurture relationship to the way that human beings act, and even in the word phonetically you can hear the sound of shackle in the consonants for the word *shakila*-- shackle--and that's what we get shackled to; **we get shackled to our socialization.**

Ninety percent of our personality is formed by the time we're ten years old, and sixty or seventy percent by the time we're six years old, and in this period of time from zero to six we as human beings are in what is called a hypnagogic state. We think that they're alive and conscious and aware of everything that's going on, but in reality the child is just downloading what's going on in their environment.

I saw a comedic presentation of this--it was presented as comedy but often, as comedy does, it's a genius way of satirically pointing out the facts: a little Caucasian girl, maybe about three years old, had eaten cake that she shouldn't have eaten, and then when mommy is asking her what happened to the cake--"Yeah somebody came in and ate the cake, they stole the cake"--and then after a few seconds of pause the baby says, "And it was a Black man." This baby is three years old, just learning to speak, and she is ascribing the wrong that she did to a Black man. I wonder where she learned that at three.

Well, the fact is that **we are in an environment, a culture, that socializes people along the lines of what we've been calling racism**, but I would say that it's a caste system. Everything that was described in terms of various indicators of racism are the things that happen in a caste system to people who are low caste. But this personality formation, the socialization and the acculturation that has happened in this environment, whose object is to keep those at the bottom on the bottom and to exploit them to the fullest, this *shakila*, this socialization we have been subjected to, this quote-unquote white supremacy--I use that in big air quotes--has spread all over the world, and those people who are from other parts of the world are not free from having been influenced by it, indeed from internalizing it and accepting and embracing the very values that they need to apply in order to be successful in America, because the system is there whether you know it or not, accept it or not, conscious or not-- it is there.

So the socialization process doesn't operate only in America; when people come over here from other parts of the world, they bring with them those internalized values that they also have absorbed through the masterful influence of propaganda and the nature of American presence. So when you look at the way that people act, they act according to socialization, that socialization itself being fundamentally undergirded by or infused with what we call racism. It needs to be understood that **nobody is free from having been affected by**

it, those on the top and those on the bottom as well as those in the middle.

And, frankly, many of our immigrant brothers and sisters can be put into that that middle range; they're not really on the top, they're not really on the bottom; and so often times, in order to progress in this environment, in this American society, they have to demonstrate and embrace values that say, "Well, I'm not one of them, I'm with you." So whether these quote-unquote Blacks are Muslims or not, the point is that they are low-caste, the point is that they are not upper class, so the mixture of racism and classism also goes along with this Muslim mix.

So behavior comes from the socialization. The socialization sets up a disposition to react positively or negatively to certain situations. So if a person is looking at looking at a Caucasian, then there's an emotional response to the Caucasian; if they're looking at a quote-unquote African-American then there's going to be an emotional response there. These reactions come from peoples' value system; which again has everything to do with, "How do I get the best out of the world, of the society or the place that I find myself in? How do I have to be in order to do that? What are obstacles to my progress and what are advantages of what will assist me in making progress?" That's how I value things, so if I look at a Caucasian and I see Caucasian as something that would afford me a benefit, and I look at Blacks and I don't see Blacks as affording me a benefit, then I'm going to have a positive orientation and attitude and value for the Caucasian and I'm going to have a derogatory or a negative value for the Black person, because that's the structure of the system: the whites are the good ones and the Blacks are the bad ones. And we don't have to go through all the cultural artifacts that reinforce that point, but the point is that that's what gets absorbed so that becomes the value system of the individual.

Where does the value system of the individual come from? It comes from their experiences, their environment, their education, all of which are saturated with that caste racism-based system. So if we want to change the back end, the behavior—that is, **if we want people to act differently towards Blacks, you have to change the emotional set, you have to change the value system; to change the value system, you have to change the educational system, you have to change the experience, you have to change whatever in the environment reinforces the behavior**, because people act the way they act because they think that's the right way and the best way to act, and so in the system such as it is with white on the top and Black on the bottom and the other people in between, people will want to get as far away from the Black as they can by whatever means and get as close to the white as they possibly can, and unless a person is conscious of that particular dynamic in their effort to move up the scale in the society, that's precisely what they're going to do and what they're going to continue to do. It has to be a conscious act to do otherwise, but that consciousness has to



come on the front end-- education, experience, environment--**you have to get out of your circle and get into the other person's circle, you have to develop more empathy for the other.** So you have to get out of that old space, come into a new space, get a new education, and then you can see things differently.

0:40:28: Dr. Bilal: Thank you, Maha. I want to thank everybody for taking some time out of your busy schedules and lives. I will disappear briefly after this. I think Imam Shuaibe, as always, gives the sociology and so I don't have to and I appreciate that. I'll be brief on the sociology and I'll just share some of my Islamic contemplation.

I have spent a bit of time working on these issues. That is to say, I've been thinking about this stuff since I was 12 years old—maybe since I was five if you count when I started protesting the pledge of allegiance-- and after all these years of observing human beings, doing very much what Imam was describing, very much what Maha was affirming and what we're talking here about, this is part of what I've found. Take the census. The U.S census instructions will tell you if you're from North Africa to check white. And this isn't just a matter of folks from North Africa. My wife is a Ghanaian and we have these conversations all the time with fellow Africans who come from south of the desert or to the east on the continent; and I have these conversations all the time with folks from the Caribbean, and there's a general tendency--it's not a universal, it's not deterministic, but there's definitely a general tendency for people who don't have the longer roots in the country, who came, or whose family came after the 1965 immigration act changes, which is the period which we're still in, oftentimes they just don't have the benefit of being forced to reckon with what has been done here. It's not so much what has happened here but what has been done. The early Muslim immigrants to this country from places like South Asia and East Africa are noted for their mingling with indigenous disadvantaged peoples, partly because they arrived during the time when whites forced them to be associated with other disadvantaged peoples, but also because they were not as distant from such people in terms of class, education, and wealth.

But people who came more recently have come to an America where they can enjoy a different set of opportunities, and Islamically what that means is those are **Muslims who are in a position of needing to be grateful.** This is about *shukra*. To whom should folks be grateful? Definitely to Allah, right? Many people count their blessings. The majority of their family might be living somewhere back home where the conveniences of America are not so bountiful--although right now, since COVID started, I think a lot of folks are recognizing there's a price to pay; but overall, up until the past March, people were really willing to overlook a lot of the flaws in this society. And some of that has to do with not having to live neck deep in those flaws but rather living on the benefits that come to some while others have to endure the flaws to a magnified degree. Those



others in historical perspective have a tendency to be the people who bled, whose fathers, mothers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, ancestors in **general bled for the doors to be opened**, those doors that opened in 1965. **They didn't open out of the largesse of America's white people, they opened because my ancestors and other people's ancestors who often look a lot like me--but not exclusively Blacks--fought**, and there was a price that we paid, and there's a price that my generation, young folks beneath me, are paying because our ancestors fought. Someone like Imam Jamil al-Amin is in prison now. That's part of the price that our community has had to pay, the police violence that you are seeing on your television screen that has gone on for generations and just wasn't recorded often enough for it to flood the airwaves.

Many white Americans were shocked in the 1950s and 60s when the civil rights leaders very strategically chose Bull Connor in Alabama because they knew that he was going to display on camera what some more sophisticated southern whites knew better than to display. These kinds of things were strategic, and people paid the price. Martin Luther King, Jr., paid with his life. So folks who are here enjoying America's opportunities, if your choice is to enjoy those opportunities while looking down your nose at the communities whose very state is a result of the fight that we have had to fight, that our ancestors had to fight, this is what I have to say. **We came after our ancestors bled, but there's still a fight going on.**

If you come here and have no gratitude for what our ancestors have bled to do, literally—remember, America is a democracy to the extent that it is now because our ancestors bled, going all the way back to its founding as a faux democracy or a caste democracy, where only the upper caste had meritocracy and democracy. Those were the elite landed whites, the white gentry, as we often call them, and even among them only the males. That was America's beginning, and it was proclaiming itself a democracy even then. But we fought and we forced it to open. Native American indigenous people to this land fought, and we're still fighting and they're still fighting. The Mexican-Americans and many other Latinx ethnic groups that come from countries that the US government destabilized, they fought. Look up Cesar Chavez, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. They fought on this land to make this place a democracy to some extent, to the extent that you can at least look on the documents on paper and look at the lives of people who've come here voluntarily and see them taking advantage of democracy and meritocracy. This wasn't free, you didn't earn it. America didn't colonize you. It may have messed with your country at some point—listen, I'm Persian, and we had a coup in 1952 that brought us the Shah, and the list goes on and on and on. But you weren't here opening this place up for people to come and be able to look down their noses at us as we struggle with the consequences of fighting, and believe me it's not simply that Black folks are trifling; of course, there are some trifling Black folks, there are some trifling people in every group, but because so many of my people refused to accept

second-class citizenship and stood up, we got somewhere---just think of the military analogy, and I'll end on this.

When you go to war, the first platoon or squadron that has to go and face the enemy are the ones who get decimated. But their sacrifice often is what enables those who come later to take advantage of an opening and win. You don't dishonor those fallen soldiers, you honor them to the highest degree, and you don't treat their families poorly, you treat their families well for the rest of their lives, and so this is the challenge that I put out to those who were not here and did not fight and did not bleed in this land for the opportunities that are available here: learn gratitude. And **you cannot learn the gratitude if you don't know the struggle**, so you have to study the struggle. And you do not understand the struggle if you do not understand a lot of other aspects, and so you have much work to do. I don't want to make a sweeping generalization--I've met my fair share of young Arab and Desi and older Arab and Desi people who have come here and have a level of respect and a level of appreciation, but there are still challenges, because if you insist on segregating yourself somewhere with white people trying to get into the honorary white box, you've still got work to do; if you insist on keeping your children out of schools with our children, you've still got work to do; if you insist on treating our children like guests when we attend Islamic schools that you've opened, you've still got work to do. And so on that note I will close out, but I believe in the best of humanity and what we can do so I hold out hope and I continue to offer these words. Thank you. [Arabic]

0:52:43: Imam Abu Qadir: *Assalam aleikum* [Arabic] "Seek refuge with the Lord against Satan the rejected, with Allah's name, the merciful benefactor, the merciful redeemer." Like the previous speakers, I'm honored, I consider it a privilege to be on this discussion. I hope that what I've prepared to discuss can be of benefit, and I'm appreciative of Maha for her having the courage to initiate this kind of conversation in the public forum. I'm going approach it similarly to the speakers before me, but I want to begin by reading from a publication by Imam W.D. Muhammad. It's on racism, religion, and reconciliation, and this is from the back cover of the book. "Language has served racism in the world, especially in America, and that is just where the biggest creation of racism is, right here in America. The language has served to make white people feel that they are different, special, and superior, but it has also hurt them because that position is artificial. That is not true, that is not reality, so it has made white people artificial people. They have an artificial reality to deal with and then it made their subjects also artificial." So that's where I want to begin the conversation.

As Muslims, I think we have to make a serious effort to make our lives and our demonstration and our practice agree with the lofty ideas we find in the Quran and in the life of our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, because we know **we live in a world where white supremacy has affected all of the people of the**

earth. It's not some phenomena that only took place here, that African Americans experienced during slavery and post slavery and through the Jim Crow period and even to this day, but we still live in a society that's influenced by that.

The United States government holds high ideals of justice and freedom and equal protection under the law and all of these noble ideas on paper, but in the lives of the people who are asked to carry out these lofty principles, many of them fall short. Thus we see so many instances where African-American people are treated in the most inhumane ways by law enforcement and are murdered and killed, and that's part of what has stimulated this discussion. But we also have **Muslims who say that Islam is a colorblind religion**, that Islam doesn't see colors, and that's also not actually a factual statement. I think it's something that's held up by people when **they don't want to face their own biases** or their own shortcomings when it comes to how they interact with other human beings.

And we also live in a very oppressive world environment. I don't want to complicate this idea, but many of us use the language of fair skin and good hair and bad hair. These ideas are rooted in racist ideology, and we carry this on and it's just a normal part of our language, and we're perpetuating a false idea. I believe it's equally problematic when we say people of color versus the other, which means we're saying there are white people and everybody else is people of color, and that also is an unscientific position that people take that helps us to perpetuate other falsehoods, because **if we say that white people are different from people of color, we're putting them on the scale versus everybody else, as though that's a balance and it's not.** It's actually a falsehood. It's perpetuating a false sense of comparison. It's a false comparison when "white" people have as many colors as the rest of us. They have black hair, blonde hair, brown hair, yellow hair red hair; they have a variation in their eye colors; they have variations in the pigmentation of their skin.

So then when Muslims don't want to identify with people of color because of the inherent racism that has come to them as a result of their colonization and their identification with the dominant force in the culture, which happened to be white people, we also have to understand that that came as a result of a religious indoctrination. Imam W.D. Muhammad taught us early on that white supremacy utilized **the image of a white savior to dominate the darker people of the world** with this ideology of a white savior on the cross, and the scheme was to gain political and material dominance over the darker people of the world, and they've done that, and they continue to spread this idea that God is a man, and we Muslims, in our book, the holy Quran, are told that we should warn those who say that God has a son that this idea gives people a sense of arrogance, and then when they act out of that arrogance we have the kind of problems that we are facing in the society today.



I would like to pause here and read from the same book, in Allah's name, the merciful benefactor, the merciful redeemer. Out of respect for man's creator, a message of concern by Imam W.D. Muhammad: What would happen if people would sit in churches throughout the world for centuries with the image of an African-American man as the savior of the world before them, what would this do to the minds of the world's children? What would happen to the world's children put under a figure of a particular race presented pitiable and in pain, the savior of all men? Quran chapter 3 verse 64: "Say, o people of the book, come to common terms as between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, that we associate no partners with him, that we erect not from among ourselves lords and patrons other than Allah. If then they turn back, say, you bear witness that we at least are Muslims bowing to Allah's will."

Civilized nations should want their religion to be also civilized. False worship is the worst form of oppression. We are no gods, we are only men, mortals from mortals that he, Allah, created. So it's important for us to address that, because the influence of that false idea has caused some people to try to set themselves up as lords over others. **The African-American community, Muslim community, under Imam W.D. Muhammad's leadership made a strong commitment not to allow others to set themselves up as lords over us.**

Many people question our validity as Muslims. They even question us asking, who was your sheikh? and who was your imam's sheikh? They leave a lot out of the equation. Allah blesses whom he pleases, and we are grateful that Allah blessed us to come to value and appreciate the Quran, the life of Muhammad our Prophet, *sallallahu alaihi assalam*, and gave us **the responsibility placed on us to establish our Muslim life here in America.**

We're not content to just talk about the beautiful features of Islam, how Islam is for fairness, Islam is for justice, Islam is for kindness, Islam is a religion of love, Islam is a religion of generosity. All of those ideas sound well, sound good and well, but what we need to see is **to see those in practice**, we need to see those in operation. We don't need to hear about all of the beautiful features on an automobile while it's parked in the driveway. We need to get in the vehicle that Allah has given us and drive it to our destiny. **Our destiny is to establish a model Muslim community similar to the one that was established under Muhammad the Prophet [Arabic] in Medina**, and part of our work as the Muslim community in America was learning how to civilize ourselves, because we had been treated as less than human, less than what God intended we should be treated by other human beings. So we had to go through a painful period of just getting ourselves in the right condition for education, for business, for cultural life, for social life, for establishing community life, and

we're still in that process and we're going to do this job whether we have friends and allies or not, because we're going to be held accountable by our Lord who has given us this religion to establish the model Muslim community life in America, and we accept that challenge and we're going to need friends and allies.

However, if we have to do it by ourselves, it's okay. We're not begging people to help us or assist us, though it would be a blessing if we did have more allies, especially from those who say they believe as we believe. But we've experienced discrimination when we were in the faith of what was called Christianity. Though they said Christianity was a religion that was for all people, the most segregated place in America was the Christian churches 11 o'clock on Sunday morning. Those were the most segregated gatherings in America. There was a church for the whites and there was a church for the Blacks, and it almost seems as though that kind of parallel exists within the Muslim community. **There's the Muslim community of immigrants and then there's the indigenous community of African-Americans, though this is not a universal position. There are some interactions, there's some cooperation, there are some friendships, but it's not enough,** and part of why we're talking about this is because I'm sure that others are aware of the discrepancies that exist and we're not through with the work that we have to do to establish the life we want for ourselves and for our children and our grandchildren and our great grandchildren and for the future of Islam in this part of the world. We have a great deal of work to do and part of it is that we have come to be comfortable with our book, the Quran; we love it, we are establishing our life based upon it, and most of our teachers have been people who came from the same circumstances as we have.

Some of our students have had the good fortune of going abroad and studying in different parts of the Muslim world, but some of them have to go through a debriefing when they come back home, because some come home and are no more of any benefit to themselves or their families when they come back from being experimented on in different cultures. So we have many challenges that come up when your children go to school, when your children go off to universities and colleges, where they might encounter some experiences that affect their life from then on. So we have to be protective of our future, and we are doing our best. This is a very serious discussion.

I don't want to point the finger of blame on anyone, because I think all of us have some blameworthy characteristics that we're trying to make improvements upon, and we want Allah to bless our work and we hope that we're approaching this with sincerity, and we hope that we can bring about some changes in the language, in the way people see each other. We want to present a picture of ourselves to the world that the world can respect, and the Quran has stood us up and made us respectable. The example of our prophet Muhammad [Arabic] has given us the confidence to lead ourselves and we're going to continue in that vein.

Thank you, *assalamu alaikum*,

1:08:48: Imam Muhammad Ali: [Arabic] *Alhamdulillah*. Thank you for making us part of this esteemed group. I'm blessed to be counted among you, I'm blessed to be among you and being given the opportunity to share some perspectives. One of the things that continues to come to mind as each of us have spoken on this idea of being anti-racist is how much of this message and all of the steps and all of the call to action that we have spoken of throughout this series are so **firmly rooted in the Quranic message, in the spiritual lifestyle of the Messenger, *sallallahu alaihi wasallam***, and you know the Quran gives us this idea consistently, this idea of *taqwa*, which is, in the most simple meaning, consciousness or awareness, and it's something that we have to carry through to every aspect of our life. It's a spiritual mandate that, along with many other facets of human life and interaction, sometimes we neglect. This often gets neglected in the midst of culture and ritual, and essentially you often find a sort of capitalistic organization with a Muslim cherry on top that then gets washed away. But the central theme of this religion is to develop *taqwa*, and that's this idea of being aware of oneself and being aware of Allah.

The Quran presents three types of knowledge, and this is what the Islamic mystics have discussed, this is what the Sufi teachers have discussed, this is what the great teachers of African-American Muslims in the United States have discussed, and so you have this idea of [*ma'rifa?* Allah] knowing Allah, this deep knowledge of Allah which we all know about or that at least we'd like to believe we know about. We understand that, but the Quran also brings, as Dr. Jamillah mentions, this idea of *ta'arafu*, that we have been made into these different tribes, nations, male and female so that we can develop [*ma'rifa?*] of one another; and then there is this [*ma'rifa?*] of oneself, and the Quran addresses this in so many different ways, this idea of *taskia*, of digging in oneself and purifying oneself.

And so when we're talking about this anti-racism, we're talking about thinking about the ways we are interacting within our culture, what things our culture is pushing us toward. All of this is being addressed in the Quran. So my point here is to bring ourselves to this book of the Quran that we have and bringing it to life again in these moments, in every moment going forward.

We have the miracle of the African-American community, including Elijah Muhammad, including Warith D. Muhammad, whose idea was **to take this Quran and apply it socially and culturally to the lives of people**. I think in many ways we start to lose that when we only see this Quran through the lens of scholars who lived 700, 800, 900 years ago, so that if someone wants to come and understand the Quran and interpret the Quran, everyone reads what those scholars wrote, which is good; but how do you **read it through the lens of what's happening right in front of us?** One of the brothers mentioned this idea of what Dr. Sherman



Jackson calls this aspiration towards whiteness, where you come into society, whites the top, Blacks at the bottom. You're in the middle, so you naturally distance yourself from those people and aspire to be like those people who have dominated, who have colonized and so on and so forth, taking their values. But the Quran addresses this: [Arabic] **don't allow your hearts to lean towards the oppressors**, those who have been oppressing others, lest you be touched with the fire and you have no protector, no guardian, other than Allah, and no one else will help you. And so this whole idea of upward mobility and of looking who's on top and sort acculturating yourself to their values, the Quran deals with that.

Another thing that the Quran addresses and what the teachings of the prophet address is just this [*dunya*], this love of the world, **this worldliness that is baked into our psychology** and baked into the capitalist society where sometimes it's not directly related to being racist, and this is why people get offended very easily when someone says they're racist, because most people are not intentionally racist; but **most people are intentionally aspiring towards ideas of prosperity and success and upward mobility, which in the American context are all tied to race**. There's no escaping that, and if we haven't laid the foundation for us to be able to see that up until now, we have a lot of work to do. And when we're given that charge of being racist or promoting racist ideas or falling into the trap of racialized thinking, the sort of sensitivity with which we respond is also born out of **a disposition that the Quran continually tries to address**.

One thing that I'd like to mention a lot to people, especially to students and to people who I work with in multi-faith settings, is the way in which Allah makes us as Muslims say in every prayer that we do: Oh Allah, guide us on the straight path. This is a consistent quranic call to us as human beings never to get complacent, never to think that we have already "arrived." And **when we incorporate this disposition in our life we can hear criticism**, we can hear someone say, Oh what you're doing is not right, what you're doing is insensitive, what you're saying is insensitive. The Quran tells us, don't sanctify yourself. Allah is the one who knows who is sanctified. We are in that place of, Oh Allah, guide us on the straight path. We're always in that place, and we should always be in that place, and so if we want to overcome these spiritual diseases, we have to remain in that place. And so when we hear those things that make us uncomfortable, we have to be ready to take on those things and understand that it's not new.

I see people post things like "Islam ended racism" and so forth, and I always respond, No, Islam didn't end racism. Racism is a human disease. **Islam offered the solution, and it's up to human beings to end racism**. This was something the Prophet faced in his own community. This is something the community faced after the death of the Prophet. This is something in the Muslim world that helped the Abbasids to come to power, because they were able to mobilize people against this idea of Arab supremacy; they were able to get support



from the Persians and the North Africans and others to overthrow the Umayyads, because the Umayyads were in a sense Arab supremacists. So these things are not new. The Prophet had companions who were Black who wanted to get married, but no one would marry anyone to them, and so the Prophet would have to come to the person's house and say, Do you not want *janna*?

These things are in our tradition, yet sometimes we have this very idealistic understanding that all the people back then were blemish free. No, this was a continuing process of purification that we as Muslims continue to have the responsibility to undergo, to aspire towards the ideals of Islam. We're not there yet, so we have to be forward thinking and not thinking backwards as if the best were behind us. The best should be ahead of us, we should be striving for something better than what we've experienced, It's a challenge, it's difficult, it's supposed to be difficult, and the Quran tells us it's supposed to be difficult: "Does man think that he will be able to say I believe and not be tested?"

Fitna in Arabic is that process of extracting the impurities from metal until you get gold, which requires in many cases heating to extreme temperatures, and so the Quran gives us an idea of jihad, of striving against ourselves. It has been my experience, having grown up learning the Quran and then studying psychology and then studying counseling and chaplaincy and so on, that as I continue to read and to learn all of these ideas about human nature, about the way human beings think about anti-racism and other things, the Quran keeps coming up, making me exclaim,, wow, I didn't even see that, I didn't see that Allah is already telling us these things that people needed many years of research to conclude--and Allah gave us that in the Quran. I think that we fail to see that because sometimes **our religious practice is so divorced from that spirit of self-purification and communal purification**, and we're striving to feel better than other people, just as sometimes race raises the badge you wear to feel better than other people. Religion becomes that, and when it becomes that, it's easy to fall into racism, because the faith and the spirituality are not in the right place.

So in short, what I'm representing is this idea of **bringing the Quran and the message of the Prophet to life**, thinking progressively about applying these lessons to our lives, applying them to the realities in front of us. Allah has given us all of this. Allah made prophet Musa, a black man fighting against a huge system of oppression, the most mentioned name in the Quran for a reason. It's not. a coincidence. And so we should be able to start to see ourselves in these stories, and when we see ourselves in these stories, we can read these verses, **we can re as an anti-racist manual, as an anti-oppression manual**, and we'll find that Allah has put everything that we need in front of us and within us.

1:23:55: Maha: Thank you, Muhammad, that was absolutely beautiful, and it was good that we had you last because I think that you touched on a lot of the points that were made earlier plus some. We're now



going to turn our attention to three ING staff people who are not Black Americans. Ameena Jandali is part India-Pakistani and white American, Ishaq is Indian and Rahimeh Ramezany is part white and part Iranian, or Persian, I should say. So we're going to hear from their perspective on what we need to do to counter anti-Black racism. We're going to start with you, Ameena, first, and Ameena is, for those of you that may not already know this, one of the ING founding members, and she's the Content Manager. Following her will be Ishaq Pathan, who is the ING Bay Area Director, and then we'll close with Rahimeh Ramezany, who's the ING Program Manager, and all of these people were actually involved in putting this series together, so I want to acknowledge them for that and thank them so much for their effort in in making this. So Ameena, let's go ahead and start with you.

1:25:19: Ameena: Thank you so much for all the beautiful knowledge and sharing. As someone who has worked on this topic and found it both distressing and fascinating, I think the first thing immigrants should do is to **learn about African American history** – especially immigrants who may have not studied this dark chapter in American history which is still with us today. Without knowledge of this history, unfortunately, many immigrants buy into **the unjust perception, which many immigrants have, that African Americans are somehow at fault for their own oppression** or that immigrants' success is due solely to their own hard work.

Muslim history did not start with the 1965 Immigration Act. Muslim history in the US - our history - begins with African American Muslims; as immigrants we often overlook this critical piece of history and only emphasize the history of immigrants, which at the earliest begins in the late 1800s, compared to African Muslims in the Americas, the earliest of whom date as early as the 1500s, with many of the documented stories in the 1700s with names such as Ayyub ibn Sulayman (1701-1773); Yarro Mahmud (1736-1823); and Abdul Rahman Ibrahim Sori (1762-1829). My son is taking a class in college right now, reading the first book written about these early Muslim Americans who continued practicing Islam in the face of great odds and adversity; it is called *Servants of Allah* by Sylviane Diouf. I am hoping that these stories will give him and other young Muslims who often struggle with their faith a newfound pride in their Muslim American identity.

It is also incumbent upon us as immigrants to give credit where credit is due. Immigrant history is not only much more recent than that of African Americans, but, like immigration today, is a story of outsiders becoming part of this nation, whereas the history of African Muslims in the US is that of people who have been Americans for generations. They are also leaders in the fight for human and civil rights. As has been stated repeatedly, **all minorities, Muslims included, owe a debt of gratitude to the civil rights struggle of our African American brothers and sisters** which paved the way for subsequent struggles by other marginalized groups. Immigrant Muslims who found out on 9/11 that they are not as welcome in this country as they had



previously thought can find both inspiration and strategies from those who have been doing it the longest in this country; all struggles for justice locally, nationally, and globally are connected despite the different players. One cannot claim to care about the plight of Muslims overseas while ignoring the grave injustices in our own backyard. African Americans are therefore our leaders in this ongoing struggle for justice and equality in the US, without whom we are all amateurs. Unlike most of us immigrants or children or grandchildren of immigrants, they have been in the US for generations and are therefore completely and authentically American without some of the hang-ups of immigrants who are trying hard to fit in.

So, first, with humility and curiosity learn about this history through the many books and webinars out there, and second, learn about your African American Muslim brothers and sisters in your own community. While I grew up in a small university town where nearly all the Muslims were immigrants, I have been blessed to live near a vibrant African American Muslim community in Oakland. It is incumbent on us, as the Quran verse emphasizes--**Allah made us in different nations and tribes – *li-ta-arafu* – literally, to get to know one another.** We can choose to stick with our cultural or linguistic group and claim to believe in the unity of all Muslims, but this verse is telling us that if we do that we are not upholding the very reason for God's creation of humans in all their diversity. We can learn so much from each other if we just make the intention and effort.

It is a shame that Muslims only embrace their African American brothers and sisters when they are famous imams or celebrities or politicians at fancy dinners in luxury hotels. This is not our prophetic tradition. Nor should we interact based on any kind of religious or other superiority because, as we know from the *hadith*, the one who struggles when reading the Quran gets the greater reward. So *inshallah* once the mosques re-open and we can once again stand shoulder to shoulder with each other, **make it a point to visit an African American mosque** or attend the Unity Eid in the East Bay, which by the way is the only Eid that I know of in the Bay Area where the food and entertainment is free!

Lastly, while it is painful to face our own shortcomings, including the fact that we all have racism in one form or the other, the first step we need to take to do the hard work of actually countering racism and working to end it is to recognize that racism is a type of arrogance. **Instead of wasting time and effort to deny it, exert the same effort to counter it**, beginning with yourself and then expanding to you friends and family, and actively challenge racism when you see or hear it. Only when we do the hard work can we quote the *hadith* and *ayat* about racism which we all love to cite: "O humankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and We made you races and tribes for you to get to know each other. The most noble of you in the sight of God are those of you who are most conscientious. And God is omniscient, fully aware." (Qur'an, 49:13)

“And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge.” (30:22)

1:31:50 Ishaq: Thank you to Maha and Ameena and to everyone on the ING staff as well as to all our speakers so far who have put all their time and energy into pulling this series together. As a non-Black Muslim, I can say first hand that I appreciate your time and preparation on this important topic. When thinking about racism, it’s important to get the framing right. **Anti-Black racism in the Muslim community is not an issue concerning Black Muslims, but rather an issue concerning us as non-Black Muslims.** In short, it is our problem. And we need to be at the forefront of addressing it. In addition to implementing the calls that my fellow panelists have discussed, I want to call us to recognize the unique access we are given to convey the message of anti-racism as non-Black Muslims. On the previous webinar in our series, a few of our African American leaders discussed their experiences with racism in the Bay Area. The problem is even more pervasive when thinking about racist attitudes that may be expressed in passing or behind closed doors where Black Muslims may not be present. Think about the relative at the holiday dinner table. Or the friend at the party who raps using the n-word. Usually, because these are close friends of ours, or everything is said in good fun, we may be hesitant to engage because doing so is viewed as creating an uncomfortable situation and breaking the peace that would otherwise exist. But the reality is that when someone pushes forward a view or an idea that is harmful to a community, the peace is already broken. The level of comfort that should be there is gone. Just as it would make an African American uncomfortable if they were present to hear those comments, we, as non-African Americans, should feel that same level of discomfort and take action against it.

It’s also common to write off our friends or those in our circle by saying, “that’s just Mohammed, he always says things like that,” but doing so is accepting that behavior and ultimately allowing it to continue. Therefore, I urge us all to take the information that we are hearing from our Black Muslim friends and convey it to those who need it most, no matter how close or far they are from us, which includes ourselves, our family and our friends. Challenging anti-Black racism has both short-term and long-term positive effects. In the short term, we are helping to avoid putting Black Muslims in our circles into uncomfortable positions. In the long term, we are working **to eradicate in ourselves and in our society this spiritual disease.**

1:35:53 Rahimeh: *Salaam alaikum* to our Muslim audience, and greetings of peace to all. Before I begin, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Imams Zaid Shakir, Faheem Shuaibe, Abu Qadir Al-Amin, and Muhammad Ali, and Drs. Jamillah Karim and Mansa Bilal King. I know with certainty that my heart is not the only one that has been moved beyond expression by your words this evening. Thank you. This is a very important conversation to have, and I am very glad the Muslim community has gotten to a point where we

can openly discuss the anti-Black racism that exists in our communities.

To culturally situate myself and where I am speaking from: I am half White and half Iranian, making me multiethnic, but I identify as White racially because of how I was socialized growing up. I come to this conversation as both a person who has a certain amount of white privilege inherited from my White ancestors, but also as the daughter of a non-White immigrant.

These last months have been eye opening for me because, like many others, I didn't realize quite how distinctly I viewed the issue of anti-Black racism as a Black/White issue. **There are a lot of non-Black POC who have not been included in analyses on racism**, and it is well past time that we do so, in order to have **an intersectional and nuanced understanding of the challenges that face us**. There are plentiful resources, exercises, and dialogue guides that discuss how White folks can learn about their privilege, the active role they need to play in dismantling white supremacy, and how to identify and work through the problematic internal, social, and systematic norms Whiteness perpetuates. However, there aren't nearly as many guides on how non-Black POC can address their own anti-Blackness that also take into account the very real disadvantages they have faced as POC and as Muslims living in the West.

When Muslim POC have their racism checked, they counter with very real examples of discrimination and cruelty that they have faced while trying to make a better life for themselves and their families. How have we enjoyed racial privileges, they may ask, when we are forced to change our names to find employment, to endure taunting and bullying from grade school to our professional offices? When co-workers, friends, and our neighbors sometimes support and encourage wars against lands that are home to many of our loved ones and support legislation that prevents us from seeing them and sharing our life's beautiful moments?

All this is true, but still it is also true that **Muslim POC experience privileges a level up from our African American sisters and brothers**. One experience does not cancel the other out. This issue requires a yes/and mindset. If you have gotten to this point in our webinar series, then you know how racism works in the United States, and we should all understand that anti-Black racism is widely prevalent in U.S. culture and always has been. We are not immune from absorbing this from the non-Muslim communities around us, and it is also a lie to think we did not have anti-Black racism in our communities back in our homelands.

So what can we do? That is what we are here in today's webinar to discuss. My contribution to add to the insightful calls to action already shared by my fellow panelists is for those who wish to interrupt the racism they witness in their families, community centers, or friend gatherings. In Islam and in many ethnic cultures that Muslims come from, the kind of 'calling out' that happens in other cultures is not considered appropriate behavior, especially if you are speaking to an elder in your family or someone who will not take direct



feedback well. What I suggest instead is **a more indirect approach, where you make opportunities to have dialogue with individuals about anti-Black racism and educate them about the history of racism in your ethnic culture and in the United States, and what current African American Muslims are experiencing in our own communities.** Do not wait for the topic to come up, but actively engage those within your circle of influence on these subjects, continue to learn and address your own internalized anti-Black racism, and share your learnings as time goes on. When you frame the conversation as sharing an interesting topic you are learning about and doing the work to correct your own implicit biases, your audience is much less likely to feel defensive and you will be able to sustain these conversations over long periods of time, resulting in the transformative change we all wish to see in our communities, inshallah.

1:40:47: Maha: Thank you so much, Rahimeh. I'll just go ahead and open it up for a discussion among the speakers, if any of you want to respond to remarks that have been made by any of the speakers or want to add anything that you missed the first time.

1:41:37: Imam Zaid: I'll start by saying I'd like to thank all of the panelists as well as the ING personnel for really speaking in such powerful and meaningful and enlightening ways. It's a great honor and pleasure to listen to all of you because I've certainly benefited tremendously from the diversity of thought, the profundity of human dignity that you all conveyed, and the honesty. So may Allah continue to bless everyone and all of the work that you do in your various areas, and if we can help in any way let us know.

1:42:35: Maha: You know, I wanted to actually speak to Zaytuna College. It's one of the few Muslim institutions where I really feel there's tremendous amount of diversity in its staff, in the scholars that are teaching the students and in the employees and in the student body as well. But that's maybe the subject of another webinar. Before we close, we're going to put up a slide that will share suggestions for other webinars that are coming up: one by Muslim ARC and another one that Dr. Jamillah Karim is involved in, that we really encourage people to attend, but any other thoughts that people have?

1:43:34: Imam Faheem: Okay, actually I just want to mention a couple of books that should look into. One of them is by Isabel Wilkerson that came out last month: *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. Also an older book from a very public writer, Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*. And I'm thinking in context of what Dr. Jamillah had brought to us about that. There's a community called Rosetto that Gladwell writes about, saying they were outliers in terms of their health and all the other things that were there that couldn't be explained by traditional measures, and the bottom line is that they really lived in the way and upon the values that Islam calls to. So I think people should see that, and also look at the robbers' cave experiment. You can find it on YouTube. It's about what's called the contact hypothesis [that personal contact between people of different



groups effectively reduces intergroup prejudice and hostility]. A Harvard-trained psychologist named Muzaffar Sherif conducted it. He was from Turkey so I'm going jump out there and say he's a Muslim. So as I listened to what Dr. Jamillah was saying, I realized the whole contact hypothesis had everything to do with [Arabic] getting to know one another. I won't go on further, but the point is that the robber's cave experiment was deliberately structured to create conflict and then to see if that contact hypothesis could be used to reduce and eliminate the conflict—and it did. This is very important, because the point is that, as Imam Muhammad Ali was saying, **Allah has already revealed what we need but sometimes we're just not aware of it.** Allah has given us the abstractions, he's given us the quote-unquote truth that researchers with their hypotheses spend a lot of time experimenting to reach—if they're blessed. So I'm saying that we should look at some of these sources, at the Quran and the work of these researchers, for actions that can actually be taken from a personal point of view that will enable us in our own individual space to operate and apply some of these principles that have been revealed in the Quran and supported by research and experimentation.

1:47:25 Imam Zaid: Imam Faheem, you reminded me in terms of outliers **what power we have when we act as Muslims.** If you look at global COVID-19 statistics, the country that's done the best with the virus is New Zealand, Number two in the entire world is Senegal. It's an outlier. Senegal has seven doctors to every 100,000 people. But the 16 million people of Senegal have only had 284 deaths and 14,000 cases since March. In the U.S., there are about 50,000 cases a day. There's a study of Senegal's dealing with the virus, it didn't say "Islam" but it did say their culture is such that **they would never have a second thought about something like wearing a mask because their culture teaches them to prioritize others,** and so, in that culture, if I need to wear a mask to prevent someone from catching something so that I don't expose people, I'm going to wear a mask unhesitatingly. And there are other cultural realities and rules in Islam that put them in that position to be the second most effective country on earth despite the very—for lack of a better word—thin resource base. And so **when we practice our religion it empowers us to do things that some people might deem impossible.**

I think people who understand Islam understand that potential, and for that reason Arnold Toynbee, arguably the greatest historian of the 20th century, said that Islam can solve the race problem, and he also identified racism as a spiritual disease. And so as we approach it I think one way **we have to look at racism,** in addition to all of the ways that were discussed today, is **as a spiritual disease amenable to a spiritual cure,** and that cure lies when we elevate ourselves above what the world has made us—the world has made us racist to a greater or lesser extent, and we can rise above that because we cultivate our spirit; and our spirit is not of the stuff of the world, it's not of material stuff that, for example, Marxism or atheism reduces us to.



1:50:36. **Maha:** Anyone else? Dr. Jamillah?

1:50:42. **Dr. Jamillah:** So indeed as Muslims we have a lot of potential and there's proof in our book; as Imam Muhammad said, we already have the manual and we also have the example of our beloved Prophet's voice and there's also sociological proof. And I'm thinking about what Imam Faheem mentioned. I especially liked his words that we had to get out of our own space and into a new space, and that just reminded me of some of the language that I used in my book. I talked about our communities being made up of ethnic Muslim spaces and so, practically, that was the way for me to talk about how you have African-American Black Muslim spaces, Desi Muslim spaces, Arab spaces, or mixtures, and so a lot of what I was showing was that **even though we have these divides we also have these moments where we're crossing these ethnic Muslim spaces**. So even though they are ethnic Muslim spaces, they are all Muslim spaces, and you see people crossing ethnic lines, for example, at a majority white university where there's the MSA and so people are going to come to the MSA because everyone's looking for that kind of socialization, and that's going to bring us together; or if you're fighting Islamophobia, as I referred to in my passage, people are going to come together; or when we all wear hijab and notice each other on the campus, we come together. So I was talking about just really thinking about those spaces and then being deliberate about moving across them.

Lastly I'll just mention one that really stood out to me, the immense IMAN space in Chicago, the Inner City Muslim Action Network space. I was doing research when IMAN wasn't as popular as it is today--that was 20 years ago-- but what always struck me was the way that Rami Nashashibi decided to live in the inner city, so not only was his organization there but he actually lived there, and that was always a way to strike up a conversation and ask ourselves: **to what lengths will we actually go to, again, move out of our old spaces, to resist our privilege, to send our children to school with Black children**; and a lot of people just are not willing to do that. But it was just good to be able to engage and ask that question and then inspire people to make those kinds of moves, even if not as radical or as profound as actually living in a black neighborhood. But I really think that's the only way we're going to really make change. Our movements and actions really have to be radical, they really do, because, again, the racism is just so pervasive.

1:54:05. **Maha:** Thank you, Dr. Jamillah. Anyone else want to jump in and add anything before we put up the slide for what next for people?

1:54:13. **Dr. Bilal:** I wanted to add just a little bit supporting Dr. Jamillah's point. She uses the word radical, which I think is appropriate. It's the way that we as Muslims have to think. Those who have thought that way in our history are people who transform societies. And I think there is a push, just as you find in the Quran from Pharaoh, to identify anything that does not fit with the current structure and does not support the



current structure as a threat to people's sense of comfort. But **it is exactly that radical thought in that radical movement, that radical love, that transforms society.** The community of the Prophet would not have worked if people weren't willing to leave their homes, to live in a room with someone that they just met, to share houses or split their houses in half to host the *muhajirun*. A society is built through this sense of solidarity. We can't think that we are going to fix problems in this country by raising money and throwing money at things. If we are going to be a truly Islamic community that's going to transform this society towards Islam, we have to have solidarity, we do have to be willing to live together, to be uncomfortable together and grow from that point. When I was a teenager, I heard a motivational speaker, I forget his name, but he said something that I always remember: everyone wants the glory, but very few want to live the story. So we look at all these great people at their end point, but all of the hardship and ache and pain that it took to get to that point is set aside. We as Muslims, if we want to have that prophetic community, we have to somehow be willing to live the story, and that's the only way, that is the radical way, towards what we're looking for as a community

1:57:27: Maha: That's beautiful.

Imam Zaid: I wanted to address something quickly that Ameena mentioned: the darkness, and that **we can subtly engage in a subtle form of racism by seeing African-American history as just so dark and gloomy and painful that we create the image of the perpetual victim** and we strip any subjectivity of the community. So, yes, there was pain, but there were a lot of parties interspersed with that pain, there were family reunions-- right after slavery people walked across the south to find family members that were sold off. **So there were tremendous triumphs of the human spirit** that humanize and uplift our history and empower us to see that despite the pain, despite the institutional pressures and realities and structures and racism and white supremacy, there were tremendous incredible triumphs of the human spirit, there were people who overcame those odds to accomplish incredible things academically, institutionally, building institutions that are here to this very day--so it's not all doom and gloom. There's pain and there are parties, so we should never forget that when we look at the history. There was bleeding but there was a lot of bandaging up those wounds, both on ourselves and on others, and then getting on with life. So may Allah give us *tawfiq* to see the full picture of the history; and then in seeing the full history, we see our fellow Muslims and our fellow people in this country who've been oppressed, certainly, but we see in them human beings that have the power to overcome and with some help and assistance to really rise and shine. There's a lot to be proud of and there's a lot that's instructive in terms of how others can overcome and maintain. I know there's a very famous activist in New York (not Linda Sarsour), who on February 12, 2001, had to go to work, and she took her hijab off. She said she went to the subway platform and then she saw her African-American sisters, four of them, in hijab,

wearing the same things that she had worn on September 10th So she put her hijab back on and said, if they can do it I can do it. **And so if we can overcome the brutality of slavery and maintain our human dignity, anybody can do it.**

2:00:20: Maha: *Masha Allah*, thank you, thank you, Imam Zaid. This is partly why the second webinar is one of my favorite webinars, where we talked about African-American institutions, thought leaders, academics, and scholars. I really hope that people revisit that particular webinar because it shows the accomplishments and the growth, speaking to what Imam Abu Qadir al-Amin said earlier: we're not waiting for anyone to come in, we've been doing it, we've survived all this history, and **we continue to grow, and we hope that we can all join together and be united in that growth and development.** So with that, Ishaq, if you could put up the slide, because I want to have people know what's out there.

We hope people have enjoyed this series and will come back to it, but I wanted to let everyone know that there are two events that I think would be worth your while. One is Anti-racism Webinar 101 by Muslim ARC, which is a wonderful organization that does this work; this is what their core competency is. Anti-racism work is not ING's core competency, but we felt that it was important for us as children of immigrants to take the initiative to do this work, as Ishaq pointed out and as many other people have pointed out to us: that it's important for us, for the immigrants, for the Arabs and the South Asians, to take the initiative to address anti-racism in their communities.

Muslim ARC has two webinars, September 16th or September 20th and this is where you can register: <http://bit.ly/ARC101WEBINAR>. We also recommend that every American Muslim institution in the country hold anti-racism sessions for your organization, even if you think you're "woke," that you're not racist--this is actually really important to do if you think this way, because I thought the same way, and I shared my story, I confessed my experiences with this, that it wasn't until I read *White Fragility*--just to help me understand the white folks that I was speaking to about Islamophobia—and I had no idea that I would be impacted by it the way that I was. I recommend that book, and there are a lot of other books that I think Muslim ARC could probably recommend. Dr. Jamillah, could you speak to this upcoming program?

2:03:16: Dr. Jamillah: We have a program titled Invisible Muslims--Re-envisioning Black Studies in Islamic Education. We started today. We launched our first course, Africa in the Quran, and we're running alongside it this course, African Quran African Muslim Scholars, and then in October we're going to have two sessions: one is The Black Sahaba, and the second is African or Muslim Movements from Africa to the Americas, and we have Dr. Bilal, myself, Angelica Lindsay Ali, Yusuf Carter, and Rashida Saadiya James, and [?] We really encourage you to join us as we explore what Imam Muhammad talked about, especially in the

African Quran course, and in all of the courses as we talk about these sacred stories and how it's so important that we see ourselves in them. It's just beautiful to see how this is always revealing itself and manifesting these insights as we're experiencing and as we're growing. This would just further your *taqwa* and anti-racism.

2:04:59: Maha: Thank you so much, Dr. Jamillah. We'll go ahead and end here and thank all of our speakers once again for contributing to this wonderful series. It's going to continue to play on our Facebook page. It's already been viewed by about a quarter of a million people, and we're going to continue to keep it up there. It's also on the ING YouTube channel. I'm going to ask Ameena to go ahead and do a closing dua.

2:06:20: Ameena: I'm just going to end with a couple of the *ayat* or verses of the Quran, one of which has been referenced a lot, and then give a common *dua* or chapter from the Quran. So the first one is from chapter 49 verse 13, where it says, "*Bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim*, O humankind we have created you from a single male and female and made you into races and tribes for you to get to know one another. The most noble of you in the sight of God are those who are the most conscientious, and God is omniscient, fully aware." And then the second one is in chapter 30 verse 22, where it says again "In the name of God the compassionate the merciful: and among his signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the difference of your languages and colors. Verily in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge." And finally [Arabic] "Humans are in a state of loss except for those who believe and those who do good works." So *inshallah* this will be a testimony for all of us in our good works and *inshallah* it will enable us all to go out and to make a better world and to make a more unified *ummah*.