



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on February 22, 2015

Obama's History 101: "Islam Has Been Woven Into the Fabric of Our Country Since Its Founding"

You've probably never heard of Founding Fathers named Gamal bin Washington and Tamar Jefferson, and neither has Barack Obama. But this didn't stop him from making the claim that "Islam has been woven into the fabric of our country since its founding."



While speaking in the White House's South Court Auditorium during a conference on "countering violent extremism" last week, Obama [said](#) that we need to "stay true to the values that define us" and "show that we welcome people of all faiths." The president then made the following claim:

Here in America, Islam has been woven into the fabric of our country since its founding. Generations of Muslim immigrants came here and went to work as farmers and merchants and factory workers, helped to lay railroads and build up America. The first Islamic center in New York City was founded in the 1890s. America's first mosque [founded in 1929] — this was an interesting fact — was in North Dakota.

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Of course, both these events occurred long after our country's founding; in fact, 1890 was the year of the 11th U.S. census, which led to official recognition that there was no longer even a Western frontier in the nation. And there were no sheikhs or mullahs at the Constitutional Convention more than a century before.

Yet the Wednesday remark was just one of many historically illiterate statements by Obama, who at the recent National Prayer Breakfast likened the Crusades to Islamic jihad despite their having actually been a [response to Islamic jihad](#). But the claim that Muslims were instrumental in America's founding has been a theme with the president. As *CNS News* [pointed out](#):

"I also know that Islam has always been a part of America's story," Obama said in a [June 2009 speech in Cairo](#), Egypt. "Islam has always been part of America," he said in a [2010 statement](#) marking the start of Ramadan. And in a 2014 statement marking Eid, Obama said the holiday "also reminds us of the many achievements and contributions of Muslim Americans to building the very fabric of our nation and strengthening the core of our democracy."

Yet experts label this attempted myth-making. As the *Blaze* [reports](#), relating comments historian David Barton made on Glenn Beck's radio program:

"In all the reading I've done, thousands of books, there's nothing there [relating to Islamic contributions in early America]," Barton said on Friday. "I mean, we know that Muslims were the folks who captured the slaves sent to America, largely out of Africa.... The Muslims did the slave



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hunting and the slave trading, et cetera. The first Muslims came to America as a result of the Muslims capturing them and sending them to the Dutch traders.”

Note that the Muslim slave trade continues to this day. *Frontpage Mag* [reported](#) on the modern Arab child-slave trade in 2011, a phenomenon that saw what perhaps was its most brutal iteration hundreds of years ago when young African and European boys would be captured, castrated, and then sold into bondage by North African Muslims.

The reality is that Muslim contributions were rare in 19th-century America and not very consequential. Barton cited as an example the U.S. Army’s 1856 retaining of a Muslim to train camels for use in Indian wars in the Arizona desert; the effort was abandoned as the animals proved too slow to keep pace with the Indians.

Yet Muslims certainly are “woven” into our *history*, and they did help with the re-establishment of the U.S. Navy — by attacking American merchant vessels and enslaving and ransoming their crews.

The Islamic Barbary States of North Africa had long engaged in piracy, and their attacks on U.S. shipping in the late 18th century led to Congress’ 1794 [authorization](#) of the building of six naval vessels and the establishment of the Department of the Navy four years later. Interestingly, another myth peddled by Obama relates to this period.

While hosting a 2012 *Iftar* dinner at the White House, where Muslims break the Ramadan fast, Obama [said](#) to the attendees, “Thomas Jefferson once held a sunset dinner here with an envoy from Tunisia — perhaps the first Iftar at the White House, more than 200 years ago.” He then referenced Thomas Jefferson’s Koran and called it “a reminder, along with the generations of patriotic Muslims in America, that Islam ... is part of our national story.”

But striking is what was left unsaid. The envoy was Tunisian emissary Sidi Soliman Mellimelli, who Jefferson hosted toward the end of the First Barbary War (1805) “in an attempt to bribe him into submission after the *USS Constitution* captured ships from the bey of Tunis,” as Breitbart’s Ben Shapiro [puts it](#).

In reality, Jefferson did not have a rosy view of Islam and would be shocked by Obama’s revisionist history. Just consider what Jefferson [reported](#) was the answer when Tripoli’s envoy to London, Ambassador Sidi Haji Abdrahaman, was asked in 1785 why his people would “make war upon nations who had done them no injury”:

The Ambassador answered us that it was founded on the Laws of their Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have acknowledged their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as Prisoners, and that every Musselman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.

As Shapiro [points out](#), John Quincy Adams emphasized this Islamic perspective when he wrote of the Tripolitan negotiations and stated:

The precept of the Koran is perpetual war against all who deny that Mahomet is the prophet of God. The vanquished may purchase their lives, by the payment of tribute; the victorious may be appeased by a false and delusive promise of peace; and the faithful follower of the prophet may submit to the imperious necessities of defeat: but the command to propagate the Moslem creed by the sword is always obligatory, when it can be made effective. The commands of the prophet may



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be performed alike, by fraud, or by force.

Shapiro then wrote, “Quincy Adams would later lament, ‘Such is the spirit, which governs the hearts of men, to whom treachery and violence are taught as principles of religion.’” Moreover, continued Shapiro, “Philosophers upon whom the founders relied had similarly negative views of Islam.... The historical record demonstrates that Islam had virtually no role in the foundation of the early Republic outside of being used as a negative comparison point for freedom and self-government.”

So was Islam woven into our country’s founding? It seems more like Obama was weaving a tangled web of a tall tale.

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