

The Journal of Religion

McCLOUD, AMINAH BEVERLY. *Transnational Muslims in American Society*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. 161 pp. \$39.95 (cloth).

Aminah McCloud pioneered in writing about African American Muslims, and here she publishes an eloquent, indigenous, African American Muslim view of immigrant Muslims in the United States. She includes short overviews of five immigrant Muslim groups to introduce African American Muslims and other Americans to Muslim diversity in America. Save for an introductory discussion of Islam and some brief comparisons between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims, there is little on religion or theology in this book. Indeed, McCloud's point is that culture has supplanted religion, blinding immigrant Muslims to the essential teachings of their own faith and to the potential contributions of African American Muslims to Islam.

It is an angry book, angry at American intolerance of Islam and Muslims and even angrier at immigrant Muslims for being, not immigrants on the path to assimilation, but "diasporan Muslims who are transnationals," whose "alliances are to family and country of origin, rather than to this country" (4-5). Lumping together all immigrant Muslims in the introduction, McCloud alleges that "few know much of the cultural history of any country outside of the 'home' country" (5), a point repeated throughout the book as she insists that much of what the immigrants believe to be Islamic is really cultural and should be discarded or adapted to the United States. In addition to acquiring citizenship and doing well in one's profession, she believes that transnational Muslims need to learn how to compete in "the public spaces of a multicultural, multireligious, multiethnic democratic society" (5-6). McCloud sees "an ever expanding chasm between transnational and indigenous Muslims on issues of foreign and domestic policy as well as the definition of Islam" (9).

McCloud reviews the American context in chapter 2, discussing the nature of citizenship (the positives of individual autonomy and opportunity vs. the negatives of racial discrimination) and the common American equation of Muslims with Middle Eastern Arabs. Chapter 3 offers a useful introduction to Islamic beliefs and practices, emphasizing that Arab culture sometimes prevailed despite Islamic religious teachings, for example, with respect to the treatment of women (35, 40). The chapter ends by generalizing that "corrupt rulers have kept vast portions of the Muslim world oppressed and illiterate since the eighteenth century" (36) and that "those seeking better education, more freedoms, and wealth make up the majority of immigrant Muslims in America" (40).

McCloud then moves to tell the stories of transnational Arabic-speaking, South Asian, Iranian, Chinese, and Somali Muslims; she aims to provide insight into the differences in behavior of diasporan Muslims. She relies on material she has used in teaching over the years, adding some recent references and carrying out some interviews (6-7). Unfortunately, the background chapters on modern Arab, South Asian, and Iranian history are full of dubious interpretations and overstatements. I have space here to illustrate only from her ten-page overview of South Asian history, my own subject, where her numerous errors are based on misconceptions about Brahmin or high caste societal dominance in terms of both numbers and values. For example, "the changes Islam brought to the predominately [*sic*] Hindu land were deeply resented. Islam brought shrines, cemeteries, and meat eating to a society that cremated its dead, was vegetarian, and had its own shrines" (44). Attributing strong South

Asian Muslim family values, including a necessary control of women by men, to Hinduism, she traces the continuity of these values in the United States in chapter 5. Dominated by doctors and engineers, the South Asian Muslim transnationals are able to focus on social acceptability, family cohesiveness, and security, she asserts; they carry on their cultural traditions despite living in the West. She did find generational differences, and these are reflected in quotes from interviews.

McCloud's chapters on Arabs and Arab Muslim Americans blame the discipline of anthropology for exoticizing and misleading the public (75), yet McCloud does not cite recent, excellent anthropological work on Arab American Muslims, references given in my own *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (New York, 2003; also not cited). Her inclusion of recent work is, throughout this book, erratic; more thorough reading might have prevented some of the misleading generalizations. Nonetheless, the book is worth reading for its strong stance and eloquent testimony to the diversity within the American Muslim community and the challenge McCloud throws out to immigrant Muslims. I end with two quotes from her concluding chapter. "In the United States the battle for the definition of Islam is a vicious internal war between indigenous and immigrant American Muslims" (125). "As Muslims in the West assert Qur'anic messages of justice, equality, and modest living, the realities of their racism, difficulties living in relatively open, pluralistic societies, and difficulties in getting along with each other, reveal massive contradictions. The almost absolute absence of justice, gender, and class equity, along with the extremely poor living conditions among the masses in most Muslim societies make Muslims in the West appear disingenuous when claiming adherence to Qur'anic norms" (128–29). These are important charges, and McCloud is again one of the pioneers in making them.

KAREN LEONARD, *University of California, Irvine*.

FRANKFURTER, DAVID. *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History*. Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006. xvii+286 pp. \$29.95 (cloth).

This meticulously researched and clearly argued book questions the reality of evil and will be welcomed by those, including myself, who join David Frankfurter in casting doubt upon the meaning of this dangerous and destructive idea. He argues that evil "is not something out there, organized and corrupting, but something constructed and acted out—a myth that can take on a life of its own, gripping us with terror and fascination, impelling us to purge it from our midst" (10). This is the myth of evil conspiracy and is the subject of Frankfurter's investigations.

The most obvious example is the European witch panic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but Frankfurter also examines much earlier panics, such as those that focused on early Christian groups in the Roman Empire, and much more contemporary ones, such as recent witch panics in Kenya and Zambia, and the claims of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) that arose in the United States and Great Britain in the late 1980s. The SRA panic "repeated many of the ancient and early modern features of evil conspiracy panics" but is interesting in that "it erupted among—and was led by—*secular* groups like social workers, police, and psychotherapists" (3).