

# INTRODUCTION

## Debating Moderate Islam

IN DECEMBER 2009, Feisal Abdul Rauf announced plans to open a thirteen-story Islamic community center in Manhattan. A prominent imam, Sufi shaykh, and the internationally recognized leader of the Cordoba Initiative (founded in 2004 to “heal” the divide between “Islam and the West”<sup>1</sup>), Rauf designed Cordoba House to educate Americans about the truths Islam shares with other faiths and to exemplify the “moderate Islam” he had spent nearly a decade promoting, most notably in his 2004 book, *What’s Right with Islam*.<sup>2</sup> There, in Friday messages he had delivered at his mosque since 2001 and in public appearances sponsored by the US State Department, among others, Rauf defined Muslim moderation by translating Islamic traditions into American idioms. His primary message: Islam is part of an ethical tradition originating with Abraham (the biblical patriarch common to Judaism and Christianity) and, of all the governments in the world, American liberal democracy best embodies this ethic in social form. Because US multiculturalism, pluralism, and “democratic capitalism” are expressions of the “Abrahamic” ethic—an ethic, he argues, that also characterized Cordoba, the multi-religious city of twelfth-century Spain—Rauf understands US laws and institutions to comply with Islamic law (shari’ah).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, non-Muslim Americans can accept Muslims as Abrahamic siblings, while Muslim Americans can promote American liberal values and social systems worldwide.

Both local leaders and international elites, ranging from Rauf’s World Economic Forum colleagues to the Archbishop of Canterbury, widely praised

Rauf's message of Abrahamic commonality after 9/11. Consequently, the imam did not expect significant opposition to Cordoba House. Indeed, many religious, political, and financial leaders responded positively to the project, and a Manhattan community board gave its approval. Others, however—especially politicians practiced in using fear of Islam for electoral gain—denounced the center as a “Ground Zero Mosque,” turning it and Rauf's claims of moderation into subjects of international debate.

The controversy intensified in the summer of 2010. While Rauf was on a cultural outreach tour sponsored by the State Department, Republican Congressman Peter King claimed Rauf only posed as a moderate and should be investigated for ties to radical Islam.<sup>4</sup> King was not the first public official to castigate the imam this way; he followed both Tea Party leader Mark Williams and Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives who was then an aspiring presidential candidate. Casting aspersion on the center, Gingrich argued that the medieval city of Cordoba signified not interreligious coexistence but Islamic conquest over a Christian kingdom—something, he claimed, Muslims sought to repeat in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Such accusations prompted Sharif El-Gamal, the project's developer and one of Rauf's Sufi dervishes, to rename the proposed community center after its street address: “Park51.” Still, Gingrich likened building Cordoba House to placing Nazi signs near Holocaust memorials or to erecting a Japanese cultural center near Pearl Harbor.<sup>6</sup>

Rauf, Daisy Khan (his wife and Cordoba House codirector, who cofounded and led other organizations with Rauf), and several commentators, including *The Daily Show* host Jon Stewart, responded to such hyperbole by comparing the situation of contemporary Muslim Americans to that of Catholic and Jewish Americans during the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Reiterating one of his constant themes, Rauf described overcoming nativist discrimination in the United States as part of the general “immigrant religious experience”—a sociological process Catholics and Jews had completed, providing Muslims with a template for how to successfully Americanize while retaining core tenets of faith.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Catholics, Jews, and other religious minorities did face tremendous discrimination and opposition a century ago, some of which has abated over time. As I discuss in the following chapters, however, Rauf's optimistic appeals to history and attempts to render Islamic traditions familiar to non-Muslims replicated and obscured some of the ways earlier marginalized religious groups learned to claim belonging in the United States—ways that invariably involved

contrasting their own marginalized traditions with those of even less accepted populations, such as black Americans.<sup>9</sup> Failing to recognize this dynamic, Rauf also failed to fully appreciate the political, economic, and racial positioning involved in his claims of moderation.

The story of assimilation, upward mobility, and moderation Rauf told before the Cordoba House controversy repeated a narrative created by earlier immigrants who emphasized the same ethics (including work ethics) as dominant white Protestants, as well as the moral obligation to engage in community service in order to assist those who fail to succeed in America's free-market system. As we shall see, this narrative has deeply racist roots and ramifications. It helped earlier generations of immigrants and marginalized religious and racial groups to prove their loyalties when they were suspected of having uncivilized mores or Communist sympathies, but it also perpetuated the fiction that "white" Americans (whoever is included in that category at any particular period of time) have experienced upward mobility because of their own efforts in a meritocracy, rather than because of the social capital connected to whiteness in the United States and because of the twentieth-century government-funded social welfare programs that aided whites and white ethnics but largely excluded nonwhites.<sup>10</sup> In short, this argument has served, among other things, as a way for marginalized groups to distinguish their communities from dispossessed black Americans and other so-called undeserving poor—or, in the case of black Americans like W. D. Mohammed (leader of the former Nation of Islam), to distinguish themselves from the ostensibly underserving poor in their midst. Not surprisingly, although many saw Rauf's message of American Abrahamic exceptionalism as quintessentially moderate, others—including some Muslim Americans—could not agree with it.

Rauf did not personally hold to the racist beliefs this older narrative perpetuates, nor did he even recognize that it perpetuates them. Still, he began to tell a somewhat different story after the Cordoba House controversy, in part because the controversy coincided with a recession so severe it made painfully apparent many of the economic and racial inequalities built into neoliberal free-market capitalism in the United States. Other aspects of Rauf's work also changed after that, including his public emphasis on combatting Muslim-led terrorism with Sufism, a body of tradition that involves not just the five daily prayers and other required Islamic practices but additional formal reflection and observance (*dhikr*). The idea that Sufism is the opposite of dogmatic (some would say "fundamentalist"<sup>11</sup>) Islam is as old as the idea that the United States

is a true meritocracy—that is to say, it is relatively recent. Both popular and newly politicized for domestic and international purposes, this discourse of Sufi moderation is also one with racist roots and ramifications that were unapparent to Rauf when he echoed it.

For over a century, Americans—following the work of British and German idealists and orientalists, among others—saw the mystical habits of some “Aryan” (Indian and Persian) Sufi orders (or *tariqas*, which can be Sunni, Shi’a, or a mix of both) as a welcome contrast to what they believed were the rigid attitudes of “Semites” (Jews and, more to the point here, Arabs—especially Arab Muslims). After the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis in the late 1970s, Persians/Iranians were no longer regarded in the United States as moderate counterweights to ostensibly rigid Arabs.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in the eyes of many, Sufism retained its claim to being the practice of less doctrinaire—or less “fundamentalist”—Muslims.

While this history continues to inform contemporary notions of Sufism as moderate Islam, it is reliant on such superficial and racializing generalities that few people would make the argument that Sufis are relatively moderate Muslims in the same terms today. Rauf has always been happy to receive any goodwill directed toward Sufis, but he does not engage this history in his writings. Instead, he presents religious moderation as a cultural issue (one with political and economic aspects), not a racial one. It is quickly apparent in Rauf’s work, however—particularly in the 2004 book that helped make him famous—that the moderate Islam he promotes is and will be the province of more affluent Muslims. Generally, in the United States, this means Arab and South Asian immigrants rather than black Americans. Thus, while Rauf does not replicate the explicitly orientalist racial framework tied up with assumptions about Sufi moderation, his particular promotion of Sufism and community service—merged, as it is, with an economic philosophy that ignores ongoing issues of racially differential treatment in this country—give this older orientalist narrative new racial ramifications.

As I discuss in the chapters that follow, Sufism and community service within a neoliberal market society are essential elements in Rauf’s definition of moderation. This is despite the fact that Rauf and Khan deemphasized Sufism in 2006, when Rauf began building a reputation as an international expert on Islamic law and participating in State Department outreach programs in Muslim majority regions where Sufism is often viewed with suspicion. Only after the Cordoba House controversy—during which it became apparent that many

Americans still see “Sufism” as synonymous with “moderate Islam”—did they begin to emphasize Sufism again.

While Rauf and Khan made these changes strategically, they also made them quite sincerely. Sufism and service (which Rauf often connects to Sufism) are what bring Islam to life for them. They are also practices that bring people together despite a multitude of differences. When Rauf and Khan deemphasized Sufism, it was not simply because they no longer saw it as politically expedient, but because they no longer saw it as essential to achieving some of the other goals they had formed after 9/11, including that of gaining for Muslims worldwide the kind of acceptance, freedom, and prosperity they enjoyed in the United States. The following account of their work and institutions is not intended as an exposé. Rather, it is a look at the history and present of ideas that inform the concept of “moderation” and an examination of some of the political, economic, racial, and gendered ramifications of living Islam in the ways now demanded of Muslim Americans.

### Defining and Defending American Muslim Moderation: A Method to the Madness

Although Rauf was new to the role of spokesperson for moderate Muslims after 9/11, his institutional and public leadership began long before he founded the Cordoba Initiative. When, six months after the attacks, a PBS reporter asked Rauf to explain “the key things” Islam, Christianity, and Judaism share, Rauf was serving in his nineteenth year as the imam of Masjid al-Farah in Lower Manhattan. He was also in his fifth year as the shaykh of a related Sufi group and as CEO of the American Sufi Muslim Association (or ASMA Society), which he cofounded with Khan in 1997 to promote *tasawwuf* (Arabic for “Sufism”) as authentic Islam. Although formally educated in physics rather than Islamic theology and as likely to draw income from his work in real estate as his work in religion, the fifty-four-year-old Egyptian American was also a trustee of the city’s Islamic Cultural Center, an advisor to the Interfaith Center of New York, and the author of two books on Islamic practice in America.

For some time, Rauf had planned to write a third book on Sufi *dhikr*. In response to events following the 9/11 attacks, however, he changed course.<sup>13</sup> Rather than discuss Sufism in the PBS interview, Rauf described the ASMA Society as a specifically “non-political, educational and cultural” organization designed to improve relations “between the American public and American

Muslims.”<sup>14</sup> He responded to the reporter’s question about commonality by outlining the main aspects of Abrahamic cohesion: a common ancestor, common monotheistic beliefs, and common ethics.<sup>15</sup> This subject, instead of his intended treatise on Sufism, comprised the substance of his next book, in which he also described the immigrant process of gaining acceptance as one that involved acculturating by embracing free-market capitalism and creating organizations to contribute to society through various kinds of service.

The following year, Rauf and Khan (then ASMA’s executive director), hosted an event to advance their vision of Abrahamic unity at St. Bartholomew’s Church, an influential religious and cultural institution on Park Avenue where Rauf taught classes on Sufism. On a Sunday evening that June, well-heeled New Yorkers assembled to break bread together and watch a dramatic rendering of interreligious cooperation and progress. The Cordoba Bread Fest focused on the harmonious history and spirit of twelfth-century al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) that Rauf and Khan hoped to inculcate in the United States through the ASMA Society and also to disseminate worldwide.<sup>16</sup> Enjoying broad institutional and financial support (a host of religious, cultural, political, and financial luminaries gathered for the event), the Cordoba Bread Fest also served as a public platform for promoting their newest venture, the Cordoba Initiative.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to ASMA’s domestic educational and cultural work, the Cordoba Initiative was designed to be an international policy-oriented organization that would, among other things, show how American Muslims could encourage Muslims elsewhere to overcome fundamentalism by adopting the “shariah-compliant” American frameworks that (according to Rauf) foster social progress: democratic capitalism and a religiously informed, yet officially secular, state law.<sup>18</sup>

As we shall see, both ASMA and Cordoba evolved significantly during the first decade after 9/11. Yet throughout that time, Rauf and Khan reiterated the Abrahamic narrative that Rauf had outlined at the 2003 Cordoba Bread Fest, elaborated on in his 2004 book, and repeated during hundreds of international speaking engagements. Closely examining the rendition of history in Rauf’s 2004 book, as I do in the following chapters, reveals what many accounts of the 2010 mosque controversy missed: the precarious political stance—neither fully “liberal,” as the term is commonly understood, nor politically conservative—Rauf took as he sought to define the middle way of moderation. Foregrounding the shared intellectual history of the many positions Rauf shares with Newt Gingrich also illuminates a deeper history that the imam’s promotion of liberal

inclusion omits: how many religious minorities—often immigrants caught between the American racial categories of “black” and “white”—lobbied for acceptance by echoing and adapting dominant white Protestant narratives of American meritocracy and exceptionalism, further marginalizing black Americans in the process.

The intertwined political, economic, racial, and gendered contours of moderate Islam—at least, as Rauf and Khan presented them during the first decade after 9/11—are primary subjects of this book, but they are not its only focus. In addition to examining the ideas of Rauf and Khan and the ways their institutions grew and changed, I reveal how Muslims at Rauf’s mosque responded to the work he and Khan were doing while they simultaneously attempted to live authentic Muslim lives—“balanced” ones, they often said; rarely did any use the term “moderate”—after 9/11. Many of these Muslims wanted to believe Rauf’s arguments about Islam’s compatibility with American meritocracy and exceptionalism. At times, however, when their lived experiences failed to measure up to such ideals, these Muslims interpreted Rauf’s emphases on Sufism and service differently than he did. As the years passed, the economy faltered, racist backlash belied initial optimism about the ostensibly postracial era inaugurated by the first black president, and Rauf and Khan spent less time with their Sufi community than on ASMA and Cordoba projects, some also began to question their definition of moderation and the inevitability of acceptance. After the Cordoba House controversy, as I discuss in the final chapter of this book, even Rauf came to question some aspects of the American exceptionalism he had previously promoted.

I first learned of the ASMA Society two years after Rauf’s PBS interview, at Riverside Church in 2004. Financed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Riverside has hosted visitors as diverse as Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Kofi Annan, Dick Cheney, and Hillary Rodham Clinton.<sup>19</sup> Because I had long been curious about the ways Americans combine ideas about national and religious belonging—particularly as they do so in narratives of “Judeo-Christian” heritage (itself a twentieth-century invention<sup>20</sup>)—I visited the neo-Gothic building in 2003 for New York City’s second 9/11 interreligious memorial service. I noticed immediately that the service did not include Muslims. I also noticed, however, that James Forbes (the senior pastor) carefully interrupted the “Judeo-Christian” language with which many speakers distanced Muslims from Americanness. Therefore, I was not entirely surprised the following March to learn that a local imam would be speaking from Forbes’ pulpit.

Rauf's message on that late winter morning in 2004 was that America's "Judeo-Christian" heritage is actually a tri-fold Abrahamic one. Fascinated, curious as to whether he said the same thing at his mosque, and more intrigued by the question of how Muslims there responded to it, I accepted the invitation he extended to the audience to visit Masjid al-Farah in Tribeca. "Imam Feisal," as the community called Rauf, was not present during my initial visit two weeks later. When I arrived, however, I found Faiz Khan (an emergency room doctor in his early thirties who was then serving as the assistant imam) delivering a similar message about religious commonality in the tiny storefront mosque. After the Friday prayer service ended, I told "Dr. Faiz" (his name at the mosque) of my interest in Rauf's message, and he and Dean (a sixty-five-year-old Sufi convert and self-described "Catholic boy from Brooklyn") spent the afternoon informing me over a cramped diner counter about the ways Sufi practices of Islam promote interreligious unity.<sup>21</sup> They also invited me to that evening's *dhikr* session in Daisy Khan's Upper West Side apartment, where I met other members of Rauf's Sufi group, including a Jewish American man.

It was during the communal meal following *dhikr*—which had involved prayers, reciting portions of the Qur'an, and rhythmically chanting the attributes of God while swaying meditatively or spinning prayer beads through the fingers—that someone first handed me a promotional mock-up of Rauf's soon-to-be-published book.<sup>22</sup> A blurb on the back, later replaced by a quote from author Karen Armstrong, asserted that this American imam shows how Islam is compatible with American democracy and capitalism. Although I had no doubts about the sincerity or intentions of either Rauf or Khan, I did immediately wonder about that promise and the politics that went with it. I decided I wanted to learn more.

It was not long before I realized this project would consume my attention for the next several years. Not only did I begin to research the history of Rauf's ideas and the political and economic philosophies to which they were connected, I simultaneously began ethnographic work to explore how Muslims at the mosque grappled with his teachings in their daily lives. During my first evening at Khan's apartment, before I knew Daisy had come of age in a rich Long Island community and once hopped a ride to Manhattan on the seaplane of Bernie Madoff's brother, it seemed clear that most of the Sufi dervishes there came from an affluent socio-economic bracket and might not object to Rauf's economic philosophy.<sup>23</sup> What I also did not know then, however, was

that Dean—the convert with whom I had spent the afternoon—lived in the same rent-controlled apartment in the West Village he had occupied for twenty years, and that Brother Malik—a black American high school teacher who would soon retire and become an assistant imam—lived just blocks from me in Harlem. Such things became evident only with time.

During my six years of research, I learned that dynamics among the mosque attendees and Sufi practitioners were also more complicated than I first imagined. These Muslims came from backgrounds cutting across the social, economic, cultural, and racial spectra of New York. Their reasons for choosing Masjid al-Farah as their place of worship and Rauf as their imam (and also, sometimes, their Sufi shaykh) varied greatly. Moreover, I soon discovered, the mosque was not simply led by one devoted group of Sufis. Rather, its operations and purpose were negotiated by two overlapping communities—one led by Rauf and one led by Shaykha Fariha, the woman who owned the building housing the mosque. Although Rauf had founded his own Sufi order, Fariha, following instructions from the shaykh she and Rauf once shared, allowed him to conduct services there until he could establish the independent mosque and community center he and Daisy Khan dreamed of—one that would reflect American culture as they described it and help integrate Muslims. Not only did it take me several years to understand the complicated relationships between these overlapping (and constantly changing) communities, it took me that long to appreciate the many facets of Rauf’s philosophy and the work of his and Khan’s constantly evolving organizations.

To be clear, I was not seeking definitive accounts of “true” Islam, Americanness, or moderation in my research, as there is no single definition of any of these things. Rather, I was seeking to understand the pressures on Muslims to present themselves in particular ways in America and the creativeness Muslim Americans exercised, as well as the difficulties they encountered, in such circumstances. Because of this, while my analysis has often been informed by work in Islamic studies—particularly by works focusing on the lives and practices of Muslims in the United States—I have been equally influenced by the work of historians of American religion who have charted the political and economic dynamics involved in asserting Judeo-Christian heritage, and by those who have examined the Protestant underpinnings of American society—ones that still exert pressure on non-Protestant religious groups to mold their traditions into forms resembling certain Protestant ones by, to note just one example, encouraging theologies of work and wealth similar to those derived

from strands of American Calvinism.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, I have looked to historical and anthropological analyses that point out the power dynamics involved in creating both academic and popular narratives about history and culture, commonality and difference. The theorists who draw attention to this kind of knowledge creation do not do so simply in order to prove that different groups (defined in terms of religion, culture, nation, race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status, among other things) have been written *out* of such narratives. Rather, they often focus on the racial, gendered, economic, and political power dynamics of writing various groups *in* in different ways.<sup>25</sup>

As I began to undertake ethnographic work with the communities affiliated with Rauf's mosque, I also looked for inspiration to the work of scholars of "lived religion" who draw attention to the ways religious practitioners embody and inevitably, but often unintentionally, alter the norms of their traditions as they literally *live* them—not just in the confined spaces of houses of worship or devotional prayer groups, but in the warp and woof of their everyday circumstances.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, because the lived circumstances of the Muslims I met were shaped by such things as airport screenings, subway bag searches, warrantless wiretapping, home invasions, detentions, and deportations (which mosque attendees told me about long before such things made headlines), as well as by a domestic environment of increasing economic inequality, political polarization, government surveillance, and race-based policing, I relied heavily on the works of American studies scholars to make sense of them. These include scholars who show how ideas about Islam have played a role in domestic policy debates over issues ranging from slavery to consumer capitalism ever since the colonial period, as well as those who investigate the philosophical, political, economic, and strategic connections between the Cold War and the so-called War on Terror.<sup>27</sup>

Last, but certainly not least, my analysis was influenced by direct criticism of attempts, such as Rauf's, to represent "moderate Islam." Such criticism is not the goal of my account. To the contrary, I have found that Muslim Americans who fight for acceptance in this country, including Rauf, are sometimes put into horrendously difficult situations and faced with seemingly impossible choices. Still, I recognize that criticism is something to which my account may contribute. I address that possibility here and in other chapters by discussing the other kinds of analysis that could be useful for understanding the effects on contemporary Muslim American communities of having to prove their moderation.<sup>28</sup>

## The Stakes of Moderate Islam

In the years since 9/11, both scholars and activists have questioned the pressure on Muslim Americans to prove their moderation, particularly the demand that Muslim Americans act as liaisons between the US government and Muslim communities in other locations. Rauf is not unaware of such critiques. In 2007, in fact, he published an essay in a collection titled *Debating Moderate Islam: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West*. That collection—the result of a formal conversation among religious leaders, scholars, and policy analysts about the usefulness of the “moderate” label and the politics behind it—focused mainly on foreign policy issues rather than on the domestic ones discussed here. Secondly, though, it questioned the effects of pressure on Muslim Americans to participate in State Department programs or to serve in some other way as liaisons between the United States and Muslims elsewhere. While the contributors did not discuss other pressures on Muslims in the United States—ones that have since become public, such as the government’s mass arrests, detention, and abuse of Muslim immigrants in the days after 9/11; the placement by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of innocent Muslim American citizens on the government’s No-Fly List of suspected terrorists and subsequent refusal to remove their names unless these citizens agreed to spy on friends and families; and the New York Police Department’s decade-long secret surveillance program that involved placing undercover (pseudo-Muslim) officers in mosques, student groups, and recreation centers, among other things<sup>29</sup>—these government actions placed much more psychic and physical stress on Muslim Americans than did more genteel attempts by State Department officials to enlist “moderate” spokespersons in promoting US interests. And although aware of at least some of the possible pitfalls of enacting the role of “moderate” sought by the US government, Rauf also knew of some of these law enforcement and surveillance tactics and sought to relieve the pressure exerted by them.

After 9/11, several worshippers from Masjid al-Farah were summoned to police headquarters for interrogations about their lives, histories, religious practices, and relations. Others, I am told, simply disappeared. Although the extent of invasive surveillance campaigns carried out by the National Security Administration and the New York Police Department would not become clear until nearly a decade later, Rauf had begun working with the FBI as early as 2003 to try to dissuade intelligence officials from categorizing all Muslims as

possible terrorists.<sup>30</sup> These were not things he generally discussed in public, however, and he also tended to discourage anyone else, such as Faiz Khan—his assistant imam until 2006 and someone who had cofounded the ASMA Society along with Rauf and Daisy Khan in 1997—from doing so.

Caught between desires to defend his community from immediate threats and to be accepted by non-Muslim elites who could improve that community's situation in the long term, Rauf acknowledged in his contribution to the debate over "moderate Islam" that "the term 'moderate Muslim' is problematic."<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, he acceded to the latter desire when he contended, "we need to define . . . Muslims who can be worked with" (presumably, in this case, for foreign policy ends) "and those who cannot." He then proceeded to enact his moderation by reiterating his primary message of Abrahamic commonality and arguing that the United States has had a "profound impact" on Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish societies around the world. "It is time for an American Islam," he continued, "that will translate into the Islamic and Western vernacular . . . the best of the United States: its pursuit of the second religious commandment [loving one's neighbor as oneself] through the benefits of an Islamic democratic capitalism."<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Rauf promoted his Shariah Index Project—a Cordoba Initiative program he started in order to evaluate the Islamic authenticity (or shari'ah compliance) of various countries' legal systems, and one that would consume most of his energy after the failure of Cordoba House.<sup>33</sup>

Commenting on the debate about moderation to which Rauf contributed, Columbia University anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani, quoting political philosopher Leo Strauss, noted that repressed groups often feel compelled to "coordinate speech with such views as the government believes to be expedient."<sup>34</sup> Less intentionally, Mamdani cautioned, repressed groups may internalize "repression as common sense" and even promote it themselves to some extent. The appropriate action for scholars in such circumstances, he continued, is to resist the expedient views—in this case, the idea that there are only two kinds of Muslims, "moderates" and "extremists"—and to "broaden the parameters of discussion" by examining the histories of such ideas and the politics connected to them. Following Mamdani's lead but focusing on domestic issues rather than international ones, I do just that in the pages that follow, keeping in mind as I do so that defending Muslims by promoting certain kinds of moderation was something always done—by Rauf, Khan, and many who worked with them—with an eye on the very real consequences of being deemed "immoderate."

## Chapter Summary

*Making Moderate Islam* opens with an examination of Rauf's philosophies, bringing to light the host of racialized tenets about American meritocracy and exceptionalism on which his 2004 book relies. In the first chapter, I parse the components of Rauf's narrative of moderate Islam in order to reveal the political, economic, and philosophical similarities between Rauf's thought and that of some of his detractors—in particular, Newt Gingrich. These similarities, in turn, illuminate the racialized tropes of assimilation and inevitable upward mobility many marginalized religious groups have echoed and adapted while explaining their own traditions in ways that demonstrate compatibility with American free-market capitalism and Protestant-derived secularism.

I turn in Chapter 2 to how Rauf's father, a high-profile immigrant imam from whom Rauf derived much of his material, worked with Catholic and Jewish neoliberals in the 1970s while competing with other Muslim leaders—particularly, black Americans—to serve as a spokesperson for Muslims in the United States. I include in this chapter some of the political and economic developments that have given rise to tensions between some black American Muslims and American Muslims of Arab and South Asian ancestry. These tensions, which involve contests since the 1960s over political representation, religious authority, and economic resources, have inspired both black American and immigrant Muslims to emphasize their embrace of free-market capitalism and their participation in community service as they jockey for influence with American elites. As I discuss at the end of the book, they also contributed to the estrangement of Rauf and Khan from many other Muslim American groups during the 2010 controversy and cost the Cordoba House project valuable support at a time when it was most needed.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I map in detail the creation and evolution of the organizations launched by Rauf and Khan. I begin by locating Rauf and his Sufi order within the history of Sufism in the United States, then turn to his and Khan's shift from describing their work as Sufi, American, and cultural in orientation to interreligious, international, and policy-oriented. In the process, I show how their goals and self-presentations changed as they attempted to accomplish their objectives while simultaneously meeting different non-Muslim elites' shifting demands for particular kinds of moderate spokespersons. Although I discuss some of the racial and ethnic assumptions underlying Rauf's cultural, sociological, and historical writings in the fourth chapter, I describe

these in more detail in Chapter 5, where I show how Rauf positioned Sufism as the bridge between a multitude of differences, including those separating immigrant Muslims from black American Muslims, rich Muslims from poor, Sunni from Shi'a, and (in his words) Islam from the West. Taking a more ethnographic turn, Chapter 5 also looks at how Rauf's dervishes struggled with aspects of his and Khan's definition of moderation, particularly Rauf's insistence that Muslims engage in the "greater jihad" of overcoming their own limited cultural traditions so as to align their practice of Islam with American democracy and capitalism. Examining some of the issues New York Sufis faced in trying to live this moderate Islam after 2001, I focus on the ways they adopted and altered such arguments so as to deal with the racial, economic, and political disparities they confronted.

Like Chapter 5, Chapter 6 is primarily ethnographic and examines the ways New York Muslims dealt with the gaps between the idea of America put forth by Rauf and Khan and the realities—particularly, the gendered realities—of their daily lives. Promoting Muslim women's rights became a central component of their work (and of their self-presentation as moderates) during the decade after 9/11, and they made the same assertions about women's equality in the United States as they did about the equality of religious and racial minorities, presenting it as a *fait accompli*. For many women who attended Masjid al-Farah, though, gender equality was more elusive, not because they were Muslim—in fact, many found the complementary models of gender parity often presented at the mosque to be more realistic and genuinely egalitarian than their lived realities outside the mosque—but because social gains for women in the United States still failed, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, to meet the hopes and promises of liberal feminists. Chapter 6 also looks at the ways attitudes at the mosque toward women's rights activists and toward the female religious leaders who were part of the community varied not just in relation to religious doctrine, but in relation to how much these women engaged in various kinds of community service.

During the six years I spent attending Friday prayers, *dhikr* sessions, birthday parties, baby showers, weddings, and other gatherings, I constantly heard Muslims connected to Rauf's Sufi group and mosque talk about embodying authentically American Islam by engaging in acts ranging from military service to staffing soup kitchens. The service expected of women, however—particularly those who commanded any kind of authority—was not just the voluntary service by which religious minorities have attempted to prove their American-

ness over the last century. Rather, it was the sort of unremunerated care work often expected of women throughout the United States, be it care for friends, for families, or for religious communities.

Such service—by women or men—is something that can be regarded as part of Sufi practice. Indeed, as Rauf and Khan spent increasing amounts of time away over the years in order to pursue their ASMA and Cordoba projects, Rauf enjoined his dervishes to take up greater responsibilities of service to their Sufi order and community. As I discuss in Chapter 7—which includes a larger examination of the politics, hopes, and fears animating the emphasis on community service among American Muslims since the Islamic center controversy—some of Rauf’s dervishes interpreted his instructions to serve and to model moderation in ways other than he intended, leading to the 2010 split within Rauf’s group and to the ultimate demise of the Islamic center project as he envisioned it.

By bringing to light the history and ramifications of the moderate models Rauf and Khan advocated, *Making Moderate Islam* lays bare the racism, as well as the ideas about gender, built into dominant US understandings of Muslim moderation and immigrant assimilation. Further, it exposes some of the pressures put on Muslims fighting for acceptance in the United States by people—including government officials—who have their own agendas. Not only does my account reveal the painful choices that many spokespersons for Muslim Americans face and, even more, the gaps between high-minded ideals and the lived experiences of Muslims in the United States, it also illuminates the ways that marginalized groups in America have often gained provisional acceptance (though not always equality) at the expense of others. In so doing, *Making Moderate Islam* both exposes the power dynamics in which Muslim Americans are caught at the beginning of the twenty-first century and calls into question the larger limits of liberal inclusion for religious and racial minorities in the United States and the longer histories of provisional tolerance that have masqueraded as “acceptance.”

