

Chicago's Muslim American Society-Islamic Circle of North America (MAS-ICNA) Convention

Research

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Over the weekend following Christmas 2015, as many as 10,000 Muslims convened at Chicago's McCormick Place for the 14th annual Muslim American Society-Islamic Circle of North America (MAS-ICNA) Convention. Neatly bearded men, typically in casual western clothes were much in evidence, along with a few in business suits and some in traditional, billowing cotton tunics and pants. As for the women, the overwhelming majority, including adolescents, wore modest, loose-fitting clothes and headscarves (or hijab). A few, roughly equal in number, stood out, either because a niqab covered their faces, except their eyes; or because their lack of any head-covering typically revealed long, dark – even voluptuous – hair. A non-Muslim visitor was reminded that the headscarf hardly inhibits female vanity, which on this occasion asserted itself with eye make-up, colorful prints, stylish footwear, and painted toenails.

While the majority of attendees were immigrants of Arab origin and had mostly American-born children in tow, not a few South Asian families were evident. So, too, was a small but noticeable number of blacks, typically African Americans but inevitably a few Africans.

Encountering any one of these types wouldM(J/ve)-294(im)16(mi)05(es)58(ul)f9ulintl(inTJ1.11TD[bu]1)21(ly)-25(p.)-305(srp05(sri4(im

to Islamic singers and pop groups, performing with sophisticated audio-visual equipment, including smoke machines and roving spotlights – not unlike any dance club in America, except

Make no mistake. This was the annual gathering of the American affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose Islamist brothers and sisters were ousted from power in Egypt by a military coup in 2013. In this country, within the last ten years or so MAS literature explicitly highlighted the goal of reviving the caliphate! (Though to be perfectly fair, the idea was almost certainly to do so overseas in Muslim majority societies, not here.)

But today in 2016, what insights about this reviled and feared organization can be gleaned from such a convocation? Does MAS pose a serious threat to our democratic way of life? If not, why not? Does it pose any challenges at all? Or does it constitute, as some commentators believe, a relatively benign, even helpful voice for Muslims in America?

Introduction: The Muslim Brotherhood in the United States

Before addressing such questions, it must be acknowledged that some will regard them as unnecessary, inappropriate, or even counter-productive. Certainly our media, think-tank, academic, and political elites have almost unanimously decided either that there is no connection between MAS and the Brotherhood, or that this is a question best avoided. Many law enforcement professionals certainly know the facts, but have similarly decided to avoid the issue out of concern not to alienate potential interlocutors, informants, and partners in the Muslim-American community.

Yet before 9/11, outside observers as well as Muslims themselves routinely acknowledged the Islamist origins and continuing ties of this as well as other Muslim organizations. Perversely, after 9/11 any mention of a tie between MAS and the Brotherhood came to be frowned on and avoided by our elites. In any event, Ikhwan (as the Brotherhood is known in Arabic) activists themselves have seldom been aboveboard, even with their fellow Muslims, and have consequently sown distrust and dissension in mosques, Islamic schools, and other institutions across the United States that they have typically attempted to colonize.

Yet increasingly for Muslims in America, Islamophobia has become the political-moral equivalent of racism for African Americans – a way of explaining away and

the theme that Islam has much to offer an ailing America. Moreover, Ismail's notion of working with like-minded Catholics was a sharp departure from the weekend's mantra urging Muslims to identify and work with Hispanics and blacks.

Yet once posed, this puzzle solves itself. The social and cultural conservatism that characterize Muslims, even as they struggle to adapt and assimilate to American pluralism, is totally out of place in the left-liberal, multicultural coalition that their leaders, including the Islamists at this convention, have been successfully promoting.

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This coalition, which has endured for more than a decade and shows no signs of weakening, is not only improbable, it is also counterproductive with regard to America's battle to protect itself against al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their progeny. For one thing, this coalition puts politically unsophisticated immigrants and their naïve but entitled youth under the tutelage of savvy,

foreseeable future Muslims will cast their lot with Democrats,
up and down ballots and across the nation.