



# Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem

*Zain Abdullah*

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## **Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem** Zain Abdullah

The changes to U.S. immigration law that were instituted in 1965 have led to an influx of West African immigrants to New York, creating an enclave Harlem residents now call "Little Africa." These immigrants are immediately recognizable as African in their wide-sleeved robes and tasseled hats, but most native-born members of the community are unaware of the crucial role Islam plays in immigrants' lives. Zain Abdullah takes us inside the lives of these new immigrants and shows how they deal with being a double minority in a country where both blacks and Muslims are stigmatized. Dealing with this dual identity, Abdullah discovers, is extraordinarily complex. Some longtime residents embrace these immigrants and see their arrival as an opportunity to reclaim their African heritage, while others see the immigrants as scornful invaders. In turn, African immigrants often take a particularly harsh view of their new neighbors, buying into the worst stereotypes about American-born blacks being lazy and incorrigible. And while there has long been a large Muslim presence in Harlem, and residents often see Islam as a force for social good, African-born Muslims see their Islamic identity disregarded by most of their neighbors. Abdullah weaves together the stories of these African Muslims to paint a fascinating portrait of a community's efforts to carve out space for itself in a new country.



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