

CRITICAL ISLAMIC REFLECTIONS 2005

Contemporary American Discourses on Islam: The Politics of Representation

Sponsored by:

The Muslim Students Association, Yale University

Cosponsored by:

Hartford Seminary

Yale Council on Middle Eastern Studies

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite abstracts for papers to be presented at
Critical Islamic Reflections Conference
Saturday, April 16, 2005 at Yale University

DEADLINE FOR ABSTRACT SUBMISSION: December 31, 2004

Throughout the 20th century and certainly in the beginnings of the new millennium, images and representations of Islam and Muslims abound in the academic and popular press. This year's CIR conference aims to assess what those images are and the politics that underlie their production and dissemination. To put it simply, what is being said and why? We seek to explore the language, tone, assumptions, typologies, images, and ideas used to portray Islam and Muslims in American discourse, the effect that such representations produce, and the interests they serve. We are not interested in papers that present an essential truth or simply document misrepresentations about Islam, but rather papers that investigate how representations of Islam arise and are used to form and sway public opinion.

This year's topic cuts across disciplinary lines, relating to fields such as religious studies, history, American studies, near eastern studies, literary criticism, sociology, and political science. The conference is organized around three substantive themes. The examples provided below are not intended to be limiting, but rather illustrative of the general aims of the conference. CIR invites papers that speak to any of the following:

I. The Founding Fathers and Early American Images of Islam

Focusing on the 18th and 19th centuries, what images and ideas about Islam and Muslims existed in the public discourse of American society? How did Americans, such as the founding fathers, political leaders, and opinion makers talk about Islam, and to what purpose? What influenced their perceptions of Muslims and Islam? What are the ramifications of these historical perceptions on contemporary discourses? Potential papers might analyze the role of American interaction with Muslims, whether here or abroad, in shaping American perceptions of Islam. Alternatively, papers may discuss the ways leaders such as Benjamin Franklin or Abraham Lincoln referred to Islam and the effect they wished to produce.

II. American Discourses on Islam: The View from Without

From Hollywood to RAND to hip-hop, from Bernard Lewis to Thomas Friedman to Franklin Graham, American intellectuals, artists, policy makers, and community leaders have contributed in various ways to the academic, cultural, religious, and popular images of Islam. Arguably, these images have considerable force in shaping America's attitude toward Muslims and Islam, at home and abroad. Presenters may critically analyze the language and topoi generated and employed by these opinion shapers, and how they manifest in American society. Another approach might be to investigate the interests different institutions have in specific representations of Islam, and the ways in which they promote that image. We are interested in the depictions that emanate from as broad a spectrum of American society as possible, ranging from political figures, to religious communities, to Islamicists writing in the popular press.

III. American Discourses on Islam: The View from Within

The American Muslim community is comprised of various voices that speak to and contribute different, and at times competing, conceptions of Islam and Islamic identity in the United States. Such groups include immigrants from different Muslim countries, American converts, and second and third generation American-Muslims. The voices participate in a chorus of representation, with their own ideas, aspirations, and agendas. Presenters for this discussion might focus on one segment or voice and assess how it constructs its own Islamic identity in the United States, understands its position within the larger Muslim community, and converses with those both inside and outside the Muslim-American context.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

The conference will be held on the Yale University campus on April 16, 2005. Please submit abstracts of 500 words or less by December 31, 2004. Successful candidates will be informed of their selection by January 22, 2005. Papers must be ready for online posting by March 31, 2005.

Submissions of abstracts and papers will only be accepted electronically. Please direct them as MS Word attachments to: yaleCIR@gmail.com. Further inquiries may also be made at the same email address. Additional details about the program will be available at our website www.yale.edu/cir.

Please forward this call for papers to anyone interested in contributing a paper or attending.

PUBLICATION OF PROCEEDINGS

The CIR conference is organized by the Muslim Students Association at Yale University. This year's conference is cosponsored by the Hartford Seminary. Drs. Jane Smith and Ibrahim Abu-Rabi, the co-directors of the Duncan Black MacDonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, and editors of *The Muslim World*, have consented to open and close the conference proceedings. They have also agreed to consider the final proceedings of the conference for publication in a special issue of *The Muslim World*. Contributors must be willing to publish their papers online and, if accepted, in the special issue.