

Julie Poucher Harbin

Julie Poucher Harbin writes for Religion News Service.

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Cultural Advisers Help Hollywood Rework Muslim Stereotypes

by Julie Poucher Harbin 05-24-2016



Image via RNS

As part of his “Islam in Film” class at the University of Nebraska, religious studies professor Kristian Petersen screens movies such as *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Argo* (2012), and *American Sniper* (2014) to make the point that depictions of Muslims on the big screen often involve a conflict narrative.

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Muslim Funny Fest: Using Comedy to Combat Hate

by Julie Poucher Harbin 07-22-2015



Dean Obeidallah and Maysoon Zayid. Photo via Doha Film Institute / RNS

“Muslim Funny Fest,” billed as the first-ever American Muslim comedy festival, kicks off July 21 in New York City and runs for three nights.

The fest aims to challenge misperceptions about Muslims and combat hate. It features 15 Muslim comedians — from Dubai native Ali Al Sayed to “America’s Funniest Muslim” Azhar Usman — and there are more than a few familiar names on the marquee.

Co-organizers/comedians Dean Obeidallah and Maysoon Zayid are hoping it will be an annual event, and they may take the show on the road. Their successful annual New York Arab-American Comedy Festival, which features comedians from a range of faiths, enters its 12th year this fall.

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Are Americans Ready for a Muslim President? New Poll Suggests Maybe

by Julie Poucher Harbin 07-15-2015



Saud Anwar is the mayor of South Windsor, Conn. Image via RNS.

A recently released Gallup poll found “tidal shifts” over the past 60 years in Americans’ willingness to support a well-qualified black, female, Catholic, or Jewish candidate for president.

But the study also found that 60 percent of Americans would be willing to vote for a president who was a “generally well-qualified person who happened to be Muslim.”

Throughout the month of Ramadan, which concludes July 16, American Muslims have been serving their communities — including raising more than \$80,000 for black churches burned across the South and serving 1,000 homeless on Skid Row in Los Angeles — public service that they are called by their faith to do. But as they look forward to Eid al-Fitr, the three-day celebration beginning Friday, they are also wondering whether Americans are more willing to accept their service.

“If the 60 percent is to be used as a proxy of acceptance of Muslims, I am encouraged by an upward trajectory,” wrote Saud Anwar, the mayor of South Windsor, Conn., and that

state’s first Muslim mayor.

Anwar said he believes that “religious labels are less critical” at the local level, where “people have a better opportunity to know a candidate and thus vote based on capacity to do the job and performance.”

In national elections, he said, “the labels may become more important for people.”

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At Middlebury College, Muslim Chaplaincy Is a Husband and Wife Affair

by Julie Poucher Harbin 06-02-2015



Beau Latif Scurich and his wife Naila Baloch. Photo courtesy of Beau Scurich and Naila Baloch / RNS

Many of the country’s most prestigious universities have hired Muslim chaplains in recent years to offer spiritual support to their Muslim students. Middlebury College, one of America’s oldest liberal arts schools, outmatched them all.

The small rural Vermont school hired Beau Latif Scurich and his wife, Naila Baloch, in the summer of 2014 to share the full-time Muslim chaplaincy position.

The 30-somethings, who were previously chaplains at Tufts and Northeastern universities, are the first married couple to share a full-time Muslim chaplaincy position at a U.S. college.

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408 C St. NE
Washington DC, 20002

Phone 202-328-8842
Fax 202-328-8757
Email sojourners@sojo.net