



**ROBERT F.  
KENNEDY  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS**

# **SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER**

**HUMAN RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS WHO  
ARE CHANGING  
OUR WORLD**

**DALILAH MUHAMMAD, LINDA SARSOUR,  
KEITH ELLISON, DALIA MOGAHED AND DEAN  
OBEIDALLAH: FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION**

# DALILAH MUHAMMAD

(SHE/HER/HERS)



Dalilah Muhammad was born in 1990 to Muslim parents in Queens, New York. She was only 4 years old when representatives from the NY Novas Track Club in Brooklyn witnessed her long jumps and encouraged her to join the team. In high school, she competed in various track and field events, winning several titles in the 400-meter hurdles.

Muhammad enrolled at the University of Southern California in 2008 with a track scholarship. As a sophomore, she was runner-up at the Pac-10 championships, and in 2012, she came in fifth in her specialty at the NCAA finals. At the end of her career as a USC Trojan, she was a four-time NCAA All-American. She won the 400-meter hurdles in 52.88 seconds at the 2016 United States Olympic Trials and the gold medal at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio.

Today, Dalilah Muhammad speaks out on behalf of the rights of Muslims in the United States. As part of Nike's 2017 "Equality" campaign, she called attention to injustices inherent in President Trump's executive order on immigration and rallied other athletes to add their voices in support of important causes.

**“BEING A MUSLIM WOMAN, BEING A BLACK WOMAN, JUST BEING A WOMAN IN GENERAL, WE HAVE SO MANY THINGS FIGHTING AGAINST US ALREADY, SO IT’S IMPORTANT TO BE THAT VOICE FOR SOMEONE ELSE.”**



# LINDA SARSOUR

(SHE/HER/HERS)

**“I STAND UP FOR ALL  
OPPRESSED AND MINORITY  
COMMUNITIES. THIS IS WHAT  
MY FAITH [ISLAM] TEACHES ME  
TO DO.”**

Linda Sarsour was born in 1980 in Brooklyn, New York, to Palestinian immigrants. She entered an arranged marriage at age 17 and had three children by the time she was in her mid-20s. Then, following the attacks of 9/11, she began her activism, speaking out fiercely for the civil rights of American Muslims.

Sarsour continues to stand at the forefront of major civil rights campaigns. She is the co-founder and executive director of MPOWER Change, the first Muslim online organizing platform. And she served for nearly 16 years as executive director of the Arab American Association of New York. In the wake of the 2014 police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown, she co-founded Muslims for Ferguson to build solidarity among American Muslims and to work against police brutality.

In 2015, Sarsour co-chaired the March2Justice, a march from New York City to Washington, D.C., to deliver a “justice package” to end racial profiling, demilitarize police, and demand the government invest in young people and communities. She also co-chaired the 2017 Women’s March on Washington, the largest single-day protest in U.S. history.

# KEITH ELLISON

(HE/HIM/HIS)



Keith Ellison was born in 1963 in Detroit. After graduating from Wayne State University, he converted to Islam, earned his law degree, and went to work litigating civil rights, employment, and criminal defense law. He then became executive director of the Legal Rights Center in Minneapolis.

In 2002, Ellison was elected to his first public office as a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives, and he was reelected in 2004. He was then elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and sworn in on January 4, 2007, the first Muslim to be elected to Congress. His priorities included building prosperity for working families, pursuing environmental sustainability, advancing human rights, and ending the U.S. involvement in the Iraq War.

After six terms in Congress, Ellison ran for Attorney General of Minnesota and won, becoming the first Muslim to win election to a statewide office in the United States and the first African American elected to statewide office in Minnesota. On May 31, 2020, Ellison took over as special prosecutor in the George Floyd case, and his office charged Officer Derek Chauvin with second-degree murder. Chauvin was convicted on all three counts on April 20, 2021.

**“FAITH REALLY SHOULD BE A BRIDGE, NOT A WALL. BECAUSE AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE SHOULD BE FOCUSING ON WHAT YOU BELIEVE, NOT WHAT YOUR RELIGION IS.”**



# DALIA MOGAHED

(SHE/HER/HERS)

**“I CAN TELL YOU CHARACTER TRAITS I ADMIRE AND WORK TO DEVELOP IN MYSELF— PERSEVERANCE, SELF-DISCIPLINE, COURAGE TO STAND UP FOR WHAT IS RIGHT EVEN WHEN IT IS AGAINST ONE’S FRIENDS OR ONE’S SELF.”**

Born in Cairo, Egypt, Dalia Mogahed was four years old when her family immigrated to the United States. She earned her undergraduate degree in chemical engineering at the University of Wisconsin and her MBA at the University of Pittsburgh.

Today, Mogahed combines her backgrounds in science and problem-solving as Director of Research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU). ISPU envisions an America where Muslims can thrive and, in her work there, Mogahed keeps her finger on the pulse of Muslim communities across the globe. She is also president and CEO of Mogahed Consulting, an executive coaching and consulting firm specializing in Muslim societies in the Middle East.

In 2009, Barack Obama appointed her to the President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and she has testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations regarding U.S. engagement with Muslim communities. She is frequently called on as an expert commentator and co-authored the 2008 book *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*.

# DEAN OBEIDALLAH

(HE/HIM/HIS)



Dean Obeidallah was born in 1969 New Jersey to a Palestinian father and a Sicilian American mother. A former attorney, he's the host of SiriusXM radio's *The Dean Obeidallah Show*, making him the first Muslim American with a national radio program. He is also the co-director and co-producer of the comedy documentary *The Muslims Are Coming!* —a stand-up tour of Muslim American comedians performing free shows across America to counter anti-Muslim bigotry. In the same vein, he co-created the comedy show *Standup for Peace* along with Jewish comic Scott Blakeman. They perform at colleges across the country in support of peace in the Middle East.

Obeidallah co-starred on Comedy Central's *Axis of Evil* special, and he co-created ComedyCentral.com's acclaimed internet series *The Watch List*, featuring Middle Eastern-American comedians. He was also one of the five comedians profiled in *Stand Up: Muslim American Comics Come of Age*, which aired in the U.S. and internationally.

**“...WHATEVER ROLE YOU CHOOSE TO PLAY, YOU WILL BE DOING A REAL SERVICE TO AMERICA BY MAKING ONE THING CLEAR: THERE’S NO PLACE FOR THIS TYPE OF [ANTI-MUSLIM] BIGOTRY IN OUR GREAT NATION.”**

# FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION

## LESSON GRADE LEVELS 9 TO 12

### IDENTITY AND UNDERSTANDING: COMBATING ISLAMOPHOBIA

#### UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- **ARTICLE 3:** Right to life, liberty, and security of person.
- **ARTICLE 7:** Right to freedom from discrimination.
- **ARTICLE 19:** Right to freedom of expression.
- **ARTICLE 26:** Right to education.

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Who is a Muslim?
- What is the religion of Islam?
- Where is Islam practiced and how has it spread throughout history?
- What are the Muslim-majority countries?
- How have Muslim Americans, such as Dalilah Muhammad, Linda Sarsour, Dalia Mogahed, Dean Obeidallah, and Keith Ellison, been portrayed in the U.S.?

#### OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Know the STTP defenders.
- Begin to break down stereotypes about people who are Muslim.
- Increase their understanding and knowledge of Muslim-majority countries.
- Increase their understanding and knowledge of Islam.
- Examine the similarities and differences between other ethnic or religious groups and Muslims in the U.S.

#### CONCEPTS

- Religious foundations
- Interdependence
- Global citizenship
- Cultural norms
- Values
- Empathy

#### VOCABULARY

- Muslim
- Islam
- Stereotype
- Phobia

#### TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED

- Internet access
- Computer access

#### MATERIALS

- “How To Be An American Muslim: A Satire” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6gQ8d3Nkmc>
- “Simple Islam” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mv2I9ROwwEs>
- “Explaining Islam in less than 2 minutes” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3v-frDiWrM>
- Student handouts

#### NOTE TO TEACHERS

This lesson does not attempt to cover the full study of a group of people and a major world religion. The aim of this lesson is to provide you with a point of entry into a topic that is rife with misconceptions, misinformation, and lies. At the end of the lesson you will find resources for further study should you and/or your students want to learn more.

# ANTICIPATORY SET

- Ask students to answer the following questions regarding their knowledge of Muslims:
  - What do you think you know about Muslims?
  - What would you like to know?
- Have students view [“How To Be An American Muslim: A Satire.”](#)
- As the students watch the video, ask them to write down their first thoughts.
- In small groups, have the students discuss the video and respond to the following questions:
  - Did the video support what you know about Muslims?
  - Did it challenge what you thought you knew about Muslims?
  - Did it answer what you wanted to know about Muslims?

# STUDENT ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY 1

- Ask the class to define “stereotype” and “phobia.” Write their responses on the board and as a class agree on a definition for each word. Once the students have agreed, share the following definitions and discuss any differences.
  - **STEREOTYPE:** a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.
  - **PHOBIA:** an extreme or irrational fear of or aversion to something.
- Are all stereotypes negative? Can a stereotype be positive?
- Individually and then as a class, ask the students to respond to the following questions and fill in columns 1, 2, and 3 of handout #1.
  - What are some common stereotypes you have heard about people who are Muslim?
  - Where do you think the stereotypes about Muslim people come from?
  - How have these stereotypes influenced what you have seen and heard about people who are Muslim? How do you feel about these stereotypes now?

- Assign each student to read a biography of one of the human rights defenders, then ask them to fill in column 4 of handout #1.
- As a class, share the responses to handout #1 and discuss how the stories of the defenders informed their understanding of people who are Muslim. Also discuss why and how stereotypes and stereotyping people are dangerous.

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## ACTIVITY 2 ISLAM: A GLOBAL RELIGION

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mv2I9ROwwEs>
- This channel is called Simple Islam. The link above is to the intro video, but teachers can play the additional videos in the series if they want to go more in depth.
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3v-frDiWrM>
- **ISLAM:** Islam is an Arabic word derived from the three-letter root “s-l-m.” Its meaning encompasses the concepts of peace, greeting, surrender, and commitment, and refers commonly to an individual’s surrender and commitment to God the creator through adherence to the religion by the same name.

- The five pillars of Islam:
  - **SHAHADAH:** to state belief in one god and the prophethood of Muhammad.
  - **SALAT:** to pray the five obligatory prayers each day.
  - **SIYAM:** to fast from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan each year.
  - **ZAKAT:** to pay a percentage of goods or money as obligatory charity each year.
  - **HAJJ:** an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, and a mandatory religious duty for adult Muslims (who are physically and financially capable of undertaking the journey) that must be carried out at least once in their lifetime.

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### ACTIVITY 3

## WHO AND WHERE: MUSLIMS IN THE WORLD

- In small groups, have students research and compile a list of Muslim-majority countries. As a class, share the list of countries and write them on the board.
- Ask each student to select one country to research in greater detail. Prior to the beginning of the research, ask each student to write down five things they know or believe they know about the country they selected.
- Each student will research their country and prepare a presentation for the class that should address the following topics:
  - Religion
    - How and when did Islam reach this country?
    - What other religions are practiced?
    - Do the religions coexist peacefully?

- Politics
  - What type of political system does the nation use to govern?
- History
  - Has the country always been a Muslim-majority country?
  - Was the country ever under imperial rule? If so, when did it gain its independence? Did it gain independence peacefully?
  - What population flow has the country experienced?
- Economics
  - What is the country's economic system?
  - What are the country's major resources, exports, and imports?
- Noted public figures
  - Political
  - Cultural (music, the arts, theater, literature)
  - Business
  - Sports

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## CULMINATING ACTIVITY

- Divide the class into small groups. Ask the groups to use the information learned in the previous activity to select another ethnic or religious group and highlight key similarities between the movement and acceptance of that group.
- Possible groups: Catholics, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Taoists, Anglicans, Irish, Italians, Japanese.

# BECOMING A DEFENDER

- Organize a speaker series that brings awareness of Islamophobia by presenting stories and experiences of Muslims from the community to move beyond ignorance, stereotypes, and Islamophobia.
- Take action and report any bullying or prejudice toward Muslim classmates. Schools and teachers should provide student-friendly mechanisms for reporting intolerance and violence against Muslim students.
- Hold a world religion day or culture day in class or school to embrace understanding of different religions and cultures, including Islam, to reduce discrimination, prejudices, and stereotypes.
- In the classroom setting, encourage students to discuss their own experience of stereotypes or harassment regarding their faith with other classmates. Then, ask them to reflect by comparing and contrasting the experiences of Muslim students with the stereotype of Islam. Teachers should gear the discussion toward making positive changes in addressing stereotypes related to Islamophobia.
- Volunteer at a Muslim or interfaith community center to learn about different cultures, religions, and ethnicities, acknowledge their differences, and work toward coexistence within society.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## THE ISLAM PROJECT

<http://archive.pov.org/tvraceinitiative/islam/>

This multimedia effort, aimed at schools, communities, and individuals who want a clearer understanding of Islam, emphasizes diversity, culture, spirituality, and history. The project comprises two PBS documentaries, a vibrant community engagement campaign, and an ambitious educational effort.

## TANDIS (TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION INFORMATION SYSTEM)

<http://tandis.odihhr.pl/?p=ki-mu,intro>

Developed by the ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) to offer a one-stop point of access to information on international commitments to tolerance and non-discriminatory practices, statistics, and other reports emphasizing educational programming aimed at combating intolerance and discrimination.

## ISLAMIC NETWORK GROUP

<https://ing.org/welcome-overview>

This group promotes religious literacy, cultural diversity, and interfaith engagement in schools and communities through education and community building to counter prejudice and discrimination against American Muslims. It provides multiple lesson plans, presentations, and panel discussions throughout the United States on various topics regarding Islam.

## AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCES

<http://www.teachhumanrights.com/islamophobia.html>

This multimedia lesson plan created by human rights educators addresses the stigmas associated with Muslims in America and presents insightful ways to teach students about Muslim Americans and acceptance.

## FRONTLINE: MUSLIMS

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims/>

This documentary presents substantial information on the worldwide belief and practice of Islam through interviews with diverse Muslims and cultures across a range of countries.

## GALLUP CENTER FOR MUSLIM STUDIES

[https://news.gallup.com/topic/muslim\\_studies.aspx](https://news.gallup.com/topic/muslim_studies.aspx)

This nonpartisan research center of the Gallup Organization provides in-depth data analysis about Muslims' perspectives and opinions worldwide. It addresses misperceptions and informs the global community about the religion, beliefs, culture, and global coexistence of religions.

## HUFFINGTON POST: ISLAMOPHOBIA PROJECT

<http://testkitchen.huffingtonpost.com/islamophobia/#>

Offers a comprehensive multimedia overview of Islamophobia in the United States, featuring an interactive timeline that lets viewers engage with series of events and donate to those impacted by these issues.

## LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources>

A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, this initiative promotes equality and reducing prejudice in the teaching environment. It provides anti-bias resources such as classroom documentaries, curricula, and lesson plans, along with *Learning for Justice* magazine, a publication that covers a wide range of issues including religion, ethnicity, and inclusiveness.

## ISLAMOPHOBIA KILLED MY BROTHER. LET'S END THE HATE

[https://www.ted.com/talks/suzanne\\_barakat\\_islamophobia\\_killed\\_my\\_brother\\_let\\_s\\_end\\_the\\_hate?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/suzanne_barakat_islamophobia_killed_my_brother_let_s_end_the_hate?language=en)

Suzanne Barakat gives a TED Talk on the hate-crime murder of her brother, Deah. Barakat reflects on the bigotry and violence that Muslims face and urges people to step outside of their comfort zone and into the Ally Zone.

## COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-ISLAMIC RELATIONS

<https://www.cair.com>

The largest Muslim civil liberties organization in the United States aims to promote the understanding of Islam as well as engagement and coalition-building within communities for justice and peace, and to empower American Muslims through political participation and activism.