

AMSS 40th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Looking Beyond 9/11: Islam in the West and
Democratic Trends in the Middle East and North Africa”

Cosponsored by:
Department of Sociology &
Dispute Resolution Consortium
at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY
&
Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, NY
Friday, September 23, 2011

ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Shari’ah and Moral Panic in the United States:
A Fear beyond the American Muslim Community”

By: Saeed A. Khan, Ph.D Candidate
(Wayne State University, Detroit, MI)

Current efforts to ban *Shari’ah* law in several American states imply a targeted, well organized campaign against Muslims and their ability to observe Islam in any meaningful way. Yet, these efforts cannot be fully understood absent an assessment of various social, cultural and political tensions in broader society. The controversy surrounding the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in Danish and other European newspapers has been a point of tremendous contention both within the traditional Muslim world as well as in the West. Notwithstanding the violent responses from certain quarters of Islamic society, the discourse about the cartoons primarily concerns the boundaries between the right to free expression versus the right to be free from offensive expression. For Muslims who are citizens of pluralistic societies in the West, the potential for an ideological conflict of interest is palpable: whether being loyal to the expectations of the state are antithetical to the expectations of one’s religious beliefs. This paper shall explore the issue of anti-*Shari’ah* efforts in the United States and locate the current discourse within the broader context of moral and cultural panic informed by non-Muslim factors. Specifically, a survey of how anti-Muslim rhetoric is reflective of a greater, more sustained anxiety about America’s changing demographics culminating in the eventual emergence of a majority-minority nation within two generations. An examination of developing, irreversible social currents will be presented, including immigration trends; the impact of sexual orientation debates and the election of the nation’s first minority president. Finally, the relationship between social and cultural pressures and the exploitation of societal fears shall be assessed through the trajectory of legislation and political rhetoric directed against *Shari’ah*, specifically, and American Muslims generally.