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## ***The Moslem World: A History of America's Earliest Islamic Newspaper and Its Successors***

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# ***The Moslem World: A History of America's Earliest Islamic Newspaper and Its Successors***

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**BRENT D. SINGLETON**

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## **Abstract**

In the spring of 1893, *The Moslem World* debuted as America's first Islamic publication. The paper was to be the centerpiece in Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb's Indian backed American Islamic Propaganda mission to the United States. Despite near unanimous praise from critics with regard to the printing quality of the paper, there was a mixed reaction to the paper's contents and Webb's scheme in general. The paper was only published for seven issues before financial shortfalls from India doomed the ambitious publication. As well, internal strife within Webb's movement hampered efforts to regain the necessary funding to carry on publication of the paper. In subsequent years, Webb was able to publish scaled down newspapers, but the *Voice of Islam* and the consolidated *Moslem World and Voice of Islam* were mere shadows of their predecessor and never able to fully fill the void caused by the former's collapse. This essay explores the development, publishing history, press reaction, and demise of these unique American newspapers.

## **Introduction**

Many American Muslim periodicals have been published since the turn of the twentieth-century, particularly during the past fifty years.<sup>1</sup> However, it was more than a century ago, in the spring of 1893, that *The Moslem World* became the pioneer American Muslim newspaper. The brainchild of former United States consul to the Philippines and convert to Islam, Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, the newspaper was formed in conjunction with an Indian-financed Islamic mission to the United States. *The Moslem World* and its offshoots, *The Voice of Islam* and *The Moslem World and Voice of Islam* were published sporadically from May 1893 until at least February 1896. Although short-lived, *The Moslem World* generated both enthusiasm and criticism in the press for the paper and Webb's Islamic mission as a whole. The purpose of this essay is to explore the development, publication, and demise of the newspapers as well as the reaction to them by the public and press.

## Development of *The Moslem World*

*The Moslem World* came about as a result of a contract signed in Manila during the spring of 1892 between Webb and Indian businessman and philanthropist Hajee Abdulla Arab. Arab had become aware of Webb's conversion to Islam through letters published in several Indian newspapers by Bombay politician Budruddin Abdulla Kur, with whom Webb had been corresponding for several months. Arab traveled to Manila to meet Webb and inquire about his interest in heading an Islamic mission to the United States, a proposition to which Webb immediately agreed. To solidify their understanding a detailed contract was drawn up covering all areas of the proposed Muslim mission that they dubbed the "American Islamic Propaganda." A newspaper was to be the centerpiece of the mission. Webb described the proposed publication as "a high class weekly newspaper, to be devoted to the real doctrines of Islam."<sup>2</sup>

The agreement gave management and editorship of the publication to Webb, with a total first year budget of \$13,500 for all publications and lectures produced by the American Islamic Propaganda, and \$10,000 for each of the succeeding two years to cover similar expenses.<sup>3</sup> Webb was particularly well suited for such an enterprise, having grown up in Hudson, New York, at the foot of the printing press of his father's paper, the *Hudson Daily Star*. Prior to his consul position, he had been a newspaperman for nearly fifteen years in Missouri. He edited the weekly *Republican*, in Unionville, Missouri, from 1874 to mid-1876, after which he was alternately a reporter and editor for nearly a half dozen newspapers in St. Joseph and St. Louis, Missouri. The newspapers included the *St. Joseph Gazette*, *St. Louis Journal*, *Evening Dispatch*, *Times-Journal*, and *Republic*. For a short period in 1882 Webb edited his own paper, the *Dramatic Critic*, and in 1883 he returned to the *St. Louis Republic*. He remained with the paper until taking leave for Manila in late 1887, by which time he was the Assistant City Editor.<sup>4</sup>

His friend and colleague from St. Louis, William A. Kelsoe, described Webb's skills in the following reminiscences of working with him at the *Republic*: "The most versatile man we had was perhaps Alex Webb... there wasn't a better all-round newspaper man on the paper...Webb was a practical printer, and when he couldn't find work in the writing end of a newspaper he would join the subs in the composing room."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Kelsoe wrote, "Webb was a born newspaper man...could 'Stick type' in the composing room... and in the reporters' class there were very few, if any, who could handle a big news story better than Webb or turn out copy faster than he could."<sup>6</sup> Webb was more than qualified and experienced to take on the management of the American Islamic Propaganda's newspaper.

Webb returned to the United States in mid-February 1893, after more than five years abroad and having traveled extensively through India and parts of the Middle East and England. The Moslem World Publishing Company was established a few months after his arrival and was located at 458 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, New York City. The company published books such as Webb's *A Guide to Namaz: A Detailed Exposition of the Moslem Order of Ablutions and Prayer*, but its main purpose was to produce *The Moslem World* newspaper. Webb wanted to start the publishing company sooner, but the initial funds from Hajee Abdulla Arab were delayed. When the funding finally arrived, Webb quickly put the operation into motion and released the first issue of *The Moslem World* on Friday, May 12, 1893. In his salutatory greeting, Webb described the purpose of the newspaper and possible challenges it might face:

As it will be a novelty in American religious journalism, and will develop a mine of literature new to the people of the Western hemisphere, it will, quite naturally, attract

some attention and may, possibly, arouse the active opposition of certain classes of religionists, who, apparently, are of the opinion that the spiritual enlightenment of the masses is not desirable and should be discouraged in every possible way.... Briefly stated, the purpose of *The Moslem World* is to spread abroad among the independent thinkers of America a knowledge of the character and teachings of Mohammed, and to correct those errors into which the masses have fallen, through the false history and misconceptions published by prejudiced and ignorant followers of other systems, who have written about Islam and its inspired founder.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Webb envisioned that the newspaper would bring about a “means of creating and encouraging direct intercourse between the Mohammedan world and the more intelligent masses of our country.”<sup>8</sup> Webb certainly had high hopes for the paper and realized that the success or failure of the American Islamic Propaganda lay within its pages.

To this end, Webb made it clear that *The Moslem World* would be of the highest printing quality available. He was determined to never let the critics condemn his paper as a cheap rag, no matter how harsh their criticism of its contents. In this regard he was successful; editors from around the nation lauded the paper’s quality. The *New York Times* wrote, “It is a well-printed paper of sixteen pages....it is evident that it will be capable, in the course of a year, of absorbing a very handsome sum of money.”<sup>9</sup> The *Kansas City Journal* pronounced, “*The [Moslem] World* is a beautifully printed paper, and contains evidence of very high ability in its contents.”<sup>10</sup> The *Boston Globe* called it, “bright, attractive, trenchant and thoroughly interesting.”<sup>11</sup> Many similar descriptions were written about the paper in the press as well as in correspondence from readers to *The Moslem World*. Webb, reflecting upon the press reaction to his newspaper, stated, “our journal has been declared a model of typographical beauty and a positive credit to current journalistic literature.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Contents of *The Moslem World***

The newspaper consisted of sixteen pages of newsprint wrapped and bound in a sturdy white paper cover. The nameplate on the cover presented a brilliant etching of a domed mosque capped with a large star and crescent, and framed with palm trees on either side. The title, *The Moslem World*, was formed in large faux eastern-style lettering, below which was printed the subtitle, “Devoted to the interests of the American Islamic Propaganda.” Later, in the September 1893 issue, the subtitle was altered in favor of, “To spread the light of Islam in America”. The date of publication was listed in both the Islamic Hijri and Christian Gregorian calendars. The lower two-thirds of the cover was reserved for a vivid illustration of a different Indian mosque for each issue. Within the cover, the first page of the newsprint was headed with a smaller nameplate, the mosque replaced with a large star and crescent and palm fronds. The same title lettering as the cover was employed and a varied subtitle read, “Devoted to a faithful reflection of the Islamic religious propaganda.” This was brought into line with the cover subtitle in September 1893 as well.

The paper was published almost entirely in English, save an occasional word or phrase. This was apparently a philosophical decision by Webb and not based upon limitations of Arabic typography in America. Arabic typesetting was available in New York from at least 1892, with the introduction of the Arabic language weekly, *Kawkab America*.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Webb desired

to have excerpts from preeminent Islamic texts written in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Gujarati translated into English and made accessible to the average American reader unfamiliar with these languages. For this purpose he claimed to have “a corps of translators from the East” to assist him.<sup>14</sup> With this in mind, even though most issues of the newspaper commenced with a verse from the Qur’an, it was always an English translation from the holy book.

A typical issue of *The Moslem World* consisted of general articles on Islam. These were often lengthy pieces written by prominent Western or Muslim thinkers of the time, such as G.W. Leitner, Sir Syed Ameer Ali, and Moulvi Cheragh Ali, whose *A Critical Exposition of the Popular Jihad* was republished serially in the paper from July to September. Also featured were news items from across the Islamic world, the majority of which came from India, but occasionally other locales, such as Turkey and Egypt. Much of the news was reprinted from other papers, but there were stories from foreign correspondents as well. The latter often provided personal accounts and presented unique content not available through other sources. The *Moslem World* also reprinted articles from American newspapers concerning the American Islamic Propaganda, general topics on Islam, and some that seemed to have simply caught Webb’s fancy for one reason or another. Unfortunately for historians, an odd omission from the paper was substantive news of the progress and activities of the American Islamic Propaganda. Only bits and pieces of information were offered to readers, leaving the mainstream New York newspapers as the only source of coverage for many of Webb’s activities.

The paper regularly included works of general religious poetry as well as those overtly inspired by Islam. Bylines for the poems occasionally indicated that they had been written specifically for *The Moslem World*, while others were translations or reprints of published works. The most interesting and thought-provoking items from the paper were correspondence from Americans studying Islam. Some of the letters were unsigned or listed under pseudonyms to avert repercussions from family or society. Yet many correspondents freely and openly used their names in support of the American Islamic Propaganda. For example, a letter from A.K. Brown of Santa Clara, California, claims he had converted to Islam some 40 years earlier. Emory F. Boyd, of New Britain, Connecticut, berated Christian society, then heartily stated, “No Christian paper in the world could have interested me as much as *The Moslem World*.”<sup>15</sup> Prohibitionists commonly wrote letters supportive of Webb and his paper. Horace B. Durant of Philadelphia argued in favor of Muslim immigration, stating, “We should have nothing to fear from the Moslem” if it meant more voters in favor of the prohibition of alcohol.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, a common sentiment of correspondents was expressed by Daniel Brown of Seney, Iowa, when he stated that *The Moslem World* “ought to be read by thousands of Americans, it would surely do them good.”<sup>17</sup>

Press reaction to the contents of the paper came in various forms. Most were neutral, while others ranged from hostile to supportive of a new religious voice in America. The *New Haven Journal* wrote, “Welcome to *The Moslem World*. It is evidently going to be a bright and interesting paper. And it may do some good. There are people in the country who could do worse than to become good Mohammedans.”<sup>18</sup> The *Waco Evening News* called the paper, “Decidedly the most unique publication in America to-day.”<sup>19</sup> In general, Webb seemed pleasantly surprised by the overall response, but felt compelled to excoriate his critics. He wrote,

We take this means of returning thanks to the secular press of the United States for the very cordial, fair and tolerant, manner in which it has received and criticized the first number of *The Moslem World*. It is true that some of our editorial brethren, particularly in the smaller cities and towns, have displayed a

degree of ignorance, bigotry and intolerance that they ought to be ashamed of, when referring to our journal as well as the American Islamic Propaganda, but we are glad to be able to say, that as a rule the press has treated our efforts with courtesy, justice and kindness.<sup>20</sup>

Some critics took exception with the paper's denunciation of crimes committed within America and the purported linkage between the crimes and Christian society. The paper listed as much as an entire page of news items describing heinous crimes from around the country as well as sundry acts of clergymen gone astray. Webb often sprinkled the pages with accounts of lynchings, both in the north and south, as well as other acts of bigotry. The Salt Lake City *Herald* responded in typical fashion, stating that the *Moslem World* was "illogical and unjust" in blaming Christianity for these crimes.<sup>21</sup> Webb's defense was that Christian missionaries often attempted to discredit Islam by extrapolating supposed doctrine from the un-Islamic acts of a few Muslims; therefore, he felt within his right to use a similar tactic in response. On the other end of the spectrum, the New York *Morning Advertiser* thought the *Moslem World* was too soft and if it "means business" it should take a page from the abolitionists and "club Christianity and expose its fallacies with all the earnestness of a prophet who strives to displace the false by the true. Americans love fighters." Webb disagreed with this tactic and stated, "The mission of *The Moslem World* is not aggressive but persuasive."<sup>22</sup>

The press reaction to the paper was rather subdued compared to the reaction to the Islamic mission as a whole. With regard to the latter, many condescending, sarcastic, and crass remarks were written about Webb. Examples include the *Washington Post* pondering about Webb's motives, "It is not altogether certain whether this unique and original crusade is to be undertaken in the name of the prophet or the profit there may be in it.... *The Post* is a little fearful that the enervating climate and theological mysticism of the East have more or less upset the ex-consul's equilibrium."<sup>23</sup> The *Los Angeles Times*, "Religious fanaticism is not wholly a thing of the past; it is an element of today. But perhaps no feature of it will appear more absurd than that which has recently had birth in the Quixotic brain of Alexander Russell Webb."<sup>24</sup> These sorts of comments appeared frequently in newspapers nationwide.

Despite concerns that businesses may have had about associating with Webb and *The Moslem World*, the paper was able to attract some advertising revenue. The initial ads in the paper were mainly for books and photographs that the Moslem World Publishing Company was selling, but there were also ads for two carpet importers, one for Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup (the ubiquitous nineteenth-century opium-laced teething remedy), and one for Optician, Prof. Mayer. Some ads were full-page layouts. Despite the dearth of ads, the first issue boasted to potential advertisers that the paper would "have a larger circulation in India, Turkey, Egypt, Arabia, the Straits Settlements and Burmah than any other journal published in the United States."<sup>25</sup> Later, a few more advertisements appeared, such as those for Shah's Soap and for farming equipment from the Wm. C. Barker Co. However, the total number of advertisers was rather small, and the placement of ads was limited to the inside front cover and both sides of the back cover. No ads appeared within the sixteen-page newsprint section of the paper.

Discerning the peak circulation of the newspaper is difficult, but a conservative estimate would be 400-500. Initially, the amount for an annual subscription was \$2.50 and 5¢ for a single issue. In July, the rate changed to \$1.00 for domestic subscriptions, \$1.50 for foreign, and 10¢ for a single issue.<sup>26</sup> Webb reported that the first year he received \$518.97 in subscription payments.<sup>27</sup> Given that amount, several hundred must have been printed just to meet the basic demand for foreign and domestic subscriptions. In addition, the missionary design of the

American Islamic Propaganda meant that many issues were freely given to the curious as well as to support the branches of the American Moslem Brotherhood, a loose confederation of study circles in various cities connected to the American Islamic Propaganda movement.<sup>28</sup> The paper was also offered free, worldwide, to any indigent person who inquired, and according to Webb, many took advantage of the offer.<sup>29</sup> Although the circulation total is nebulous, from correspondence printed in the paper, it is apparent that circulation extended to all corners of the United States and the British Empire, as well as some non-English speaking countries. There were agents of *The Moslem World* in over fifteen Indian cities, including Bombay, Calcutta, Hyderabad, and Delhi, and others in countries such as Burma, Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Ceylon, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and England.<sup>30</sup>

The paper was issued on the second Friday of each month. However, Webb planned to convert it into a weekly come October 1893, with issues being released every Friday.<sup>31</sup> With proper funding, this would not have been much of a challenge for Webb, since he was previously the sole editor of the weekly *Republican*, in Unionville, Missouri. Notwithstanding, funding was an ongoing problem for *The Moslem World*; Webb was cognizant that the paper would operate at a considerable loss over the first three years of publication.<sup>32</sup>

In July, after only two issues, economic realities forced Webb to increase the cost per issue from 5¢ to 10¢. Webb explained the increase as “necessary in view of the cost of printing and engraving which is greater than was first estimated, and to cover the expense of sending large numbers of copies to poor persons who want the journal but are unable to pay for it.” He announced that the paper would remain a monthly until January 1895, instead of October 1893 as previously planned.<sup>33</sup> This announcement, however, was moot; the increased price and other adjustments were of no avail. The American Islamic Propaganda ran out of funds and had no prospects for acquiring additional income, causing a cessation of *The Moslem World* after its seventh issue in November 1893.

Despite the three-year contract signed by Webb, Hajee Abdulla Arab wired funds for the final time in November 1893. Arab blamed a rapid fall in the rupee’s value and the resultant renegeing of pledged funds by Indian Muslims for his failure to live up to the agreement.<sup>34</sup> This may be factual, but he also may have been swayed by a schism that arose in the American Islamic Propaganda between Webb and his associates, John A. Lant and Emin L. Nabakoff, who formed their own Muslim movement, called the First Society for the Study of Islam in America, in December. In early 1894, Lant joined forces with a Muslim convert and newspaper editor in India, Hamid Snow, and together they set out to destroy Webb’s reputation in South Asia. They were successful in raising doubt concerning Webb’s intentions and past use of funds. Within a short period, few Indians were willing to consider funding the American Islamic Propaganda.

### ***The American Moslem***

In an attempt to further marginalize Webb and to fill a vacuum caused by the collapse of *The Moslem World*, Lant formed his own newspaper, *The American Moslem*. The first issue, published in Tarrytown, New York, in January 1894, had a simpler format and design than *The Moslem World*.<sup>35</sup> Lant took to heart advice given to him by his associate Joseph E. Wade, editor of the journal *Occultism*, when the latter warned, “Don’t make too costly a paper. Webb’s paper was fine but too expensive.”<sup>36</sup> *The American Moslem* consisted of only four pages and had no graphics, cover, or advertisements. Another associate, A.L. Rawson, considered the paper too spartan and suggested that Lant incorporate an Arabic title into the header, but Lant did not heed

this advice.<sup>37</sup> A definitive content analysis of Lant's paper is difficult to put forth because only one issue survives. What can be discerned is that by its fourth issue, the singular purpose of the paper appeared to be the castigation of Webb and defense of Lant in the former allies' dispute. Nearly half of the items in this issue relate to the controversy between the two men. The remainder of the paper consisted of a jumble of short news pieces, one extended article, and a transcript of a speech delivered before the First Society for the Study of Islam.

The paper makes note that it was supposed to be published twice monthly; however, its publication was infrequent and haphazard.<sup>38</sup> After the first issue in January 1894, two additional issues were released on unknown dates before issue 4 was published under the date "April, May, June 1894." Still, this three-month date span is misleading because the issue contained news items of events that did not occur until July and August of that year. Therefore, the actual publication date for issue 4 was sometime after August 1, 1894, allowing for a conclusion that a mere four issues were released in an eight to nine month period. As with *The Moslem World*, a lack of subscriptions and other sources of funding likely forced this erratic publication schedule and the paper's eventual demise. Lant sought funds from India, but was largely rebuffed. In a letter to Lant from Budruddin Abdulla Kur, head of the committee for Webb's American Islamic Propaganda, Kur described the feasibility of Indian support for multiple American Islamic newspapers: "The funds in the Committee at Bombay under such strained circumstances, cannot pull on two movements at a time, when one of rather old standing has been very scantily fed."<sup>39</sup>

### *The Voice of Islam*

In the face of Lant's barrage in *The American Moslem*, Webb must have felt immense pressure to get his own paper started again, not only to respond to the criticism, but also to continue the progress of the American Islamic Propaganda. Sometime in 1894, the Moslem World Publishing Company reopened at 30 East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and in June 1894, after a seven-month hiatus, began publishing a new paper entitled *The Voice of Islam*.<sup>40</sup> The paper was a scaled-down version of the original, in both content and quality, similar to *The American Moslem* in that respect. Instead of a large-format sixteen-page paper with illustrated cover, *The Voice of Islam* was more or less a modest four-page newsletter. Despite its reduced size, monetary constraints kept it a monthly publication although its format was designed for a weekly. Webb hoped that once his finances were straightened out, *The Moslem World* would be resurrected as the premier monthly publication of the American Islamic Propaganda and *The Voice of Islam* would continue to be published, but as a weekly newsletter.<sup>41</sup>

In this endeavor, the Moslem Institute in Liverpool, England, which had both monthly and weekly publications, appears to have influenced Webb. The Moslem Institute was akin to the American Islamic Propaganda in that it was a missionary organization consisting mainly of converted Westerners. Webb had been in Liverpool just prior to returning to America after five years abroad. He presumably visited the Liverpool Moslem Institute, because he was later in correspondence with several of its members. At the time of Webb's visit to Liverpool in late January or early February 1893, the Moslem Institute was in the midst of publishing the first issues of its small weekly newspaper, *The Crescent*.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that Webb received issues of the publication once he was back in America, for he often quoted from *The Crescent* in *The Moslem World*. In May, the same month that *The Moslem World* debuted, the Liverpool Moslem Institute also began publishing their lengthy monthly paper, *The Islamic World*. A year later, by the spring



of 1894, it was apparent that the Liverpool Moslem Institute had a successful model for publishing a weekly and monthly paper and likely inspired Webb to retool his publication goals.<sup>43</sup> However, Webb could only charge 3¢ per issue for the diminutive *Voice of Islam*, and advertising space was limited, an inauspicious formula for regaining financial solvency.

Soon after the first issue of the *Voice of Islam* was published, an embarrassing internal dispute arose. In July 1894, Nefeesa M.T. Keep, Secretary of the Moslem World Publishing Company, barricaded herself in the newspaper's office, and despite the efforts of Webb and police officers, she refused to allow admittance of any the paper's staff. Her purpose in locking the others out was to force Webb to resign, or failing that, to have the papers turned over to her stewardship. Keep had been with the company prior to the cessation of *The Moslem World* and was convinced that the financial troubles of the American Islamic Propaganda and its publications were due to poor management on Webb's part. She stated, "The storm has been gathering for some time. I often remonstrated about useless expenditures. I did not wish to have poor people in the East give their money for nothing."<sup>44</sup>

Keep claimed that although \$12,000 had been sent from abroad to support the American Islamic Propaganda, she was still owed \$50 in wages, and the rent on the company's office was past due. She also made reference to probable embezzlement of funds with regard to Webb's recent purchase of a farm in Ulster Park, New York. After several days, she emerged from the office to visit the Turkish Consul and state her grievance about Webb. A week later, Webb accused Keep of stealing property from the office. In return, she sought a warrant for the arrest of Webb and his wife for conspiracy, and she filed a mail fraud complaint against Webb with the Post Office Inspector.<sup>45</sup>

Despite Keep's legitimate concerns about how the publications were managed and her unpaid wages, the charges of deliberate financial impropriety were unfounded. Webb reported that he received a total of \$10,243.01 from Hajee Abdulla Arab, a sum that included Webb's travel expenses from Bombay to New York. Not including Webb's monthly salary of \$200, Arab failed to issue the remaining \$3,256.99 of promised funds for the first year budget of \$13,500. Later, these numbers were more or less corroborated by Arab.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, it became known that the farm in Ulster County was purchased through the private funds of Webb's wife, Ella, and was only done so when Webb could no longer afford to live in the city with his wife and three children. The farm was not a "retreat," as had been mentioned in some news reports, but a modest, if not ramshackle, home on a rock-strewn property.<sup>47</sup> Astonishingly, through all of this turmoil, an additional issue of *The Voice of Islam* was printed in August. But after only three months, the paper folded, and Webb permanently removed himself and the belongings of the Moslem World Publishing Company to his home in Ulster Park.<sup>48</sup>

### ***The Moslem World and Voice of Islam***

Ever resourceful, Webb managed to once again regroup, and on January 1, 1895, he issued a third publication from his new headquarters in Ulster Park. The consolidated *Moslem World and Voice of Islam* was put out by the newly named Moslem World Company, and printed at the press of Edgar S. Werner in New York City. The graphics on the nameplate were virtually unchanged from the original *Moslem World*, save the addition of "...and Voice of Islam" below the first title. The subtitle was changed to: "Devoted to the dissemination of the Islamic Faith." A

further difference was that the Islamic Hijri date of publication was dropped in favor of solely the Gregorian.

Subscription rates for the paper were 30¢ per year and 3¢ per individual issue. The abbreviated four-page layout was continued from *The Voice of Islam* and presumably the look and feel approximated its predecessor as well. As before, Webb saw the smaller paper as a stop-gap measure to continue getting news out while he waited for funding which would allow the paper to be separated into the proposed weekly and monthly formats.<sup>49</sup> Within the confines of four pages, advertisement was limited to portions of the last page, most of which consisted of announcements and sales for the Moslem World Company's available printed material. However, a small number of eclectic products were also listed over time, including Marlin Fire Arms Co., Ripans Tabules, the *New York Advertiser* newspaper, a foreign bookseller, and a patent attorney.

The structure of the paper was quite different. Instead of Qur'anic verses, the paper opened with poems, some Islamic in nature and others not, including Walt Whitman and Edward Rowland Sill. The content of the publication was made up principally of short news items from India, Turkey, and Egypt, and bits of correspondence from all over the world. Only occasionally did news appear concerning the progress of the American Islamic Propaganda or other happenings in the United States. A noticeable difference from the earlier paper was an increased number of articles and news in defense of Turkey and the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II. Virtually every issue dedicated some space to this cause, and in September 1895, an article about the Sultan entitled "A Modern Hero" took up a quarter of the issue.<sup>50</sup>

In December 1895, a reporter from the *New York Times* went to investigate Webb's situation in Ulster Park and provided a glimpse of the operation of the paper. Webb had converted the top floor of a barn into the office of the Moslem World Company. Stacked on a bench were papers in wrappers being made ready for the mail and a book of subscriber names. Webb and his 15-year-old son, Russell, handled all of the business and mailings of the paper. When asked by the reporter if he still published his paper, Webb replied, "Certainly—sadly reduced in size, but still it is a paper." Despite the past turmoil and his humble surroundings, Webb was optimistic that the long-awaited financial support from India would soon come, but it never did.<sup>51</sup>

It is unclear when *The Moslem World and Voice of Islam* ceased publication or why, but the last known issue was published in February 1896. In that issue, there was no mention of it being the final copy, but neither had there been notice when *The Moslem World* ceased in November 1893. In both cases, it appears that Webb never meant to stop publishing, but without capital he was forced to abruptly terminate operations. Despite the lack of funding from India Webb held true to the three-year contract he had signed. In January 1895, after the funding stopped, Webb stated, "I will perform, to the best of my ability, all I promised to do under my contract with Hajee Abdulla Arab. God knoweth the hearts of all men and will judge us both."<sup>52</sup>

It is unknown what Webb was doing soon after January 1896, but by 1898, he had withdrawn completely from the official American Islamic Propaganda movement and relocated his family to Rutherford, New Jersey. There he continued as a newspaperman by purchasing the *Rutherford News*, but this venture too was short-lived, and Webb sold the paper in 1900. For his impassioned defense of the Sultan and other work for Islam, Webb was named Honorary Turkish Consul-General for New York in 1901. He continued lecturing and general work for Islam until his death in 1916.

## Conclusion

Although ultimately an ephemeral venture, *The Moslem World* gained international recognition as a unique, well-produced newspaper, and it spurred religious discourse in the press of the United States. Its successors, *The Voice of Islam* and *The Moslem World and Voice of Islam* also lacked staying power, but the latter continued for more than a year and provided a continuing outlet for Islamic expression in America. The fate of Webb's Islamic mission was tied to the papers, and although he was not always forthcoming with information concerning the movement, the information the papers did provide and what can be surmised from tracking their publication history is invaluable to the study of late nineteenth-century American Muslims. As more is uncovered about Webb and his mission, a clearer historical picture may emerge from the gaps this essay was unable to fill. Specifically, issues of the *Voice of Islam* have not been found, and a definitive date for the final issue of the *Moslem World and Voice of Islam* has not been established. Nonetheless, Webb and the *Moslem World* can now be placed historically among the pioneering non-Christian religious newspapers in the United States.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> For a further discussion of the Islamic press in America, see Sulayman S. Nyang, "The Islamic Press in the United States of America," in *Islam in the United States of America*, Chicago: ABC International Group, 1999, pp. 103-114.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Russell Webb, *Lectures on Islam: Delivered at Different Places in India*, Lahore: Mohammadan Tract and Book Depot, 1893, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> "To My Oriental Brothers," *Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, January 1895, pp. 3-4. Copies of the *Moslem World* and *Moslem World and Voice of Islam* were obtained on microfilm from the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, OH.

<sup>4</sup> "Introduction," in Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, *Yankee Muslim: The Asian Travels of Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb*, ed. Brent D. Singleton, Rockville, MD, Wildside Press, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> "Alex. Webb Versatile," *St. Louis Republic*, July 12, 1908, part 15, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> William A. Kelsoe, *St. Louis Reference Record: A Newspaper Man's Motion-picture of the City When We Got Our First Bridge, and of Many Later Happenings of Local Note*, St. Louis: Von Hoffmann, 1927, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> "Salutatory," *Moslem World*, May 12, 1893, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Russell Webb, *Islam in America*, New York: Oriental Publishing Co., 1893, pp. 67-68.

<sup>9</sup> "The Islamic Propaganda," *New York Times*, May 28, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpted in: "Truly American," *Moslem World*, August 1893, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> "Editorial Points," *Boston Globe*, June 20, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> "Thanks," *Moslem World*, June 1893, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Although *Kawkab America* was published in Arabic and initially supportive of the Ottoman Sultan, it was principally a Syrian Orthodox Christian publication. Michael W. Suleiman, *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> "Salutatory," *Moslem World*, May 1893, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> "Converted Years Ago," *Moslem World*, July 1893, p. 9; "Rather Severe," *Moslem World*, August 1893, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> "Favors Moslem Immigration," *Moslem World*, July 1893, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> "It Will Do Them Good," *Moslem World*, July 1893, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Excerpted in: "New Notes," *Moslem World*, June 1893, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Excerpted in: "A Cheerful Critic," *Moslem World*, July 1893, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> "Thanks," *Moslem World*, June 1893, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Excerpted in: "New Notes," *Moslem World*, July 1893, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Excerpted in: "Deal Gently With the Erring," *Moslem World*, June 1893, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> "In the name of the Prophet," *Washington Post*, December 23, 1892, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> "News Notes," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Moslem World*, June 1893, back matter.

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- <sup>26</sup> “Special Notice,” *Moslem World*, July 1893, p. 8.
- <sup>27</sup> “To My Oriental Brothers,” *Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, January 1895, pp. 3-4.
- <sup>28</sup> “The Islamic Propaganda,” *Moslem World*, June, 1893, p. 11.
- <sup>29</sup> “Special Notice,” *Moslem World*, July 1893, p. 8.
- <sup>30</sup> Masthead, *Moslem World*, November 1893, p. 8.
- <sup>31</sup> “Special Notice,” *Moslem World*, May 1893, p. 8.
- <sup>32</sup> “Special Notice,” *Moslem World*, July 1893, p. 8.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> Correspondence from Mohammed A. R. Webb to financial backers, May 1, 1894, John A. Lant Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
- <sup>35</sup> The description of *The American Moslem* is based on Volume 1, Issue 4, available from the Ottoman Archives, Istanbul (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Maruzati. Yıldız Arşivi Sadaret Hususi 309/80).
- <sup>36</sup> Correspondence from Joseph E. Wade to John A. Lant, December 4, 1893. John A. Lant Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
- <sup>37</sup> Correspondence from A.L. Rawson to John A. Lant, January 21, 1894, John A. Lant Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
- <sup>38</sup> “Special Notice,” *American Moslem*, April, May, June 1894, p. 2.
- <sup>39</sup> Correspondence from Budruddin Abdulla Kur to John A. Lant, January 31, 1894, John A. Lant Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
- <sup>40</sup> “Trouble in Islam,” *New York Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1894, p. 12; “Muhammed Webb Locked Out,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1894, p. 5.
- <sup>41</sup> “Our Plans,” *Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, January 1895, p. 2. The author has been unable to locate issues of *The Voice of Islam*; the description is based on Webb’s account in “Our Plans.”
- <sup>42</sup> Webb arrived in the United States on February 16, 1893, after a week’s voyage from Liverpool. Alexander Russell Webb, “Preaching Islamism in America,” *Providence Journal*, Vol. 14, November 1893, p. 468. The first issue of *The Crescent* was released on January 14, 1893.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Islamic World* and *The Crescent* were published until 1907 and 1908 respectively.
- <sup>44</sup> “Muhammed Webb Locked Out,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1894, p. 5.
- <sup>45</sup> Descriptions of the Keep affair come from: “Trouble in Islam,” *New York Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1894, p. 12; “Muhammed Webb Locked Out,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1894, p. 5; “Nefeesa Keep Breakfasts,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1894, p. 1; “Mrs. Keep Visits the Consul,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1894, p. 4; “War of the Moslems Not Over,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1894, p. 8; and “Nefeesa M.T. Keep Retaliates,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1894, p. 9.
- <sup>46</sup> “Mohammed Webb’s Account,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1896, p. 3; “To My Oriental Brothers,” *Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, January 1895, pp. 3-4; “Webb’s Supply of Rupees,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1896, p. 4.
- <sup>47</sup> “Mohammedan Webb Buys a Retreat,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1894, p. 9; “Fall of Islam in America,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1895, p. 21.
- <sup>48</sup> “Son of the Prophet at Rondout,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1894, p. 1.
- <sup>49</sup> “Our Plans,” *Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, January 1895, p. 2.
- <sup>50</sup> “A Modern Hero,” *The Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, September 1895, p. 3.
- <sup>51</sup> “Fall of Islam in America,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1895, p. 21.
- <sup>52</sup> “To My Oriental Brothers,” *Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, January 1895, p. 4.