

pioneer contemporary Christian music. Religious music also survives as a daily and special occasion pastime for many people. Events such as Sacred Harp singings and fifth Sunday singing conventions take place in county courthouses and local churches. Evangelicals continue to value family gospel singing, and religious music is heard on local radio stations across the state.

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James H. Brewer, ed., *Mississippi Musicians Hall of Fame: Legendary Musicians Whose Art Has Changed the World* (2001); Bob Darden, *People Get Ready! A New History of Black Gospel Music* (2005); James Downey, in *Sense of Place, Mississippi*, ed. Peggy W. Prenshaw (1979); Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (1971); James R. Goff, *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* (2002).

Many of Mississippi's state universities, including Jackson State University, the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, and the University of Southern Mississippi, have Muslim Student Associations that provide opportunities for Muslim students and faculty to practice their religion, promote Islamic awareness, and increase understanding of the Islamic faith among non-Muslims.

Jackson is home to the International Museum of Muslim Cultures, which is dedicated to educating the public about Islamic history and culture. It opened to the public in 2001 and five years later moved to its current location at the Mississippi Arts Center.

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Kathy Hanrahan, *Associated Press* (7 January 2007); Brannon Ingram, Pluralism Project at Harvard University website, www.pluralism.org (2008); International Museum of Muslim Cultures website, www.muslimmuseum.org; Muslim Students Association website, www.msanational.org.

Muslims

Muslims are playing a vital role in the development of the state of Mississippi. They cover all spectrums of society. The state's Muslims are university professors, medical doctors, government officials, students, and members of virtually every other profession. They live in communities all over the state.

Most of Mississippi's Muslims are either African Americans or immigrants and their descendants. In the twentieth century and particularly after the 1960s, significant numbers of African Americans began converting to Islam, mostly following the guidance of Imam W. Deen Muhammad. And though a handful of Muslims came to the United States as early as the 1840s, immigration from Muslim countries in the Middle East and South Asia grew dramatically in the twentieth century.

Regardless of race and country of origin, all Muslim communities pray, celebrate, and engage in cultural activities. Some mosques are operated by the African American Muslim community and are associated with Imam Muhammad and the Mosque Cares Ministry. Mosques operated by immigrant Muslims are affiliated with the Islamic Society of North America and the North American Islamic Trust.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, Mississippi had more than fifteen Islamic centers and mosques, located in cities and towns throughout the state: Biloxi, Clarksdale, Greenville, Hattiesburg, Hickory Flat, Jackson, Madison, Meridian, Mound Bayou, Oxford, Silver Creek, Starkville, Sumrall, Vicksburg, and Waynesboro. Most have prayer halls, and several have religious schools for children.

Myths and Representations: European Colonization through 1900

The notion of Mississippi as an especially southern place did not occur to Native Americans or early European explorers and settlers—and certainly not in the ways and for the reasons that later definitions of the South were created. The place we call Mississippi was colony and frontier well before it was a state with a widely shared sense of its history, traditions, and image. The land was the home of thousands of Choctaw, Chickasaw, Natchez, Tunica, Biloxi, and Pascagoula, all with their own cultures, foundational narratives, and sense of the land and their place in it.

Early descriptions of Mississippi resemble those found in explorers' narratives of other areas of what became known as the Gulf South. Spanish and French explorers commonly marveled at the land's bounty and beauty, viewing the South as a new Eden ripe to fall into their hands. At the same time, and often in the same accounts, Europeans painted the land as a savage and uncivilized place, teeming with dangerous Indians. Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto led an expedition through the Southeast that spent the winter of 1540–41 in Mississippi. Journals kept by members of the expedition show that the explorers were fascinated by the native peoples and by the native flora and fauna. The journals also record Spanish misunderstanding and abuse of the Indians, leading to what would become a familiar pattern of violence