



< A Frat Of Their Own: Muslims Create A New Space On Campus

March 08, 2014 5:00 PM

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ARUN RATH, HOST:

Speaking of new and next, up next, meet a brand-new fraternity.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: You guys up for a toga party?

UNIDENTIFIED GROUP: Toga, toga, toga.

RATH: Well, it's not really like that, I'm afraid. There's no drinking, no wild parties or debauchery. I'm talking about Alpha Lambda Mu, the first social Muslim fraternity in the country. If you think that sounds funny, don't feel too bad. Ali Mahmoud, who founded Alpha Lambda Mu, says it started as a joke.

ALI MAHMOUD: Mango juice keggers, something along those lines. And then I thought about it a lot longer and I realized that there was this void for Muslims on campus. A lot of us come from immigrant families. And so growing up in America, a lot of us kind of have to live a double life. We have to live a life where we try to please our family in terms of our Islamic upbringing. And then we go to school, many of us public school, and we're just trying to fit in. We're just trying to be cool.

RATH: And I have to imagine that if you are a serious - or not even that serious a Muslim, but just observant and you want the brotherhood of being in a fraternity, if you're not drinking alcohol, it's probably not a very welcoming place.

MAHMOUD: Yeah. And it's not to say that all fraternities are like that, but a lot of them are. And so for the most part because there's

that stereotype, many Muslims who, like you said, observe the religion kind of turn off the fraternity scene. They're not into the drinking. They're not into the hookup culture. And so providing this alternative, it allows us to engage in what we want to and embrace what we want to.

RATH: I want to talk about the Kufi Krew videos. Now, did that predate the fraternity? Because you said it started as a joke, and it seems like kind of your sense of humor.

MAHMOUD: Kufi Krew started with the beginning of the fraternity. And if you watch the video, most of it is us joking around. I believe it starts with one of the members punching another member in the gonads and then running off and praying so that he can't get punched back.

(LAUGHTER)

MAHMOUD: So that really captures kind of what our fraternity is - what goes on in our fraternity. We're just college kids in America trying to have fun and figure out who we are.

RATH: You don't have to be drunk to find shots to the groin amusing.

MAHMOUD: Right. We're pretty crazy on our own. We don't - I'd be afraid if you hung onto us if you were intoxicated.

(LAUGHTER)

RATH: Do you worry about the fact that maybe this is isolating Muslims a little bit, or on the other side, if somebody's going to be Islamophobic, what's scarier than Muslims in a secret society, you know?

(LAUGHTER)

MAHMOUD: Right. Well, for anybody who's worried about us being a sleeper side, refer them to the Kufi Krew videos. But I can see where that concern is, but in all honesty, I don't really see how this can be fostering us from assimilating into American culture because we have nothing to assimilate to. We are American. We are

American Muslims. That's - those two don't contradict each other at all. And so we're not hiding away ourselves. We're just living with people who have the same beliefs that we do.

RATH: Obviously, there's a wide range of diverse beliefs and views in Islam. Do you try to bridge that gap between conservative and more liberal sides in your own community?

MAHMOUD: Right. So we have this group of guys who are on both sides of the spectrum and everywhere in between of what it means to be a, quote, unquote, "good Muslim." And it forces the people who are less practicing or less externally practicing of their religion. It kind of puts them in an environment more conducive to reaching the goals that they want to, and then it takes the kids who have been fostered their entire life and been isolated from, quote, unquote, "lesser Muslims," and it puts them in a position where they have to tolerate them and they have to understand them. So, really, everybody's benefitting, and we meet at this middle ground we call brotherhood.

RATH: Ali Mahmoud is a junior at the University of Texas, Dallas. He founded the first and only Muslim fraternity in the U.S. Ali, thank you.

MAHMOUD: Thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate it.

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