



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact: Jeanne Hodesh**

**347-381-3712**

**[jhodesh@brooklynhistory.org](mailto:jhodesh@brooklynhistory.org)**

**BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY AWARDED FORD FOUNDATION GRANT TO EMBARK ON PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT, *MUSLIMS IN BROOKLYN***

***Grant funding enables cultural organization to lead initiative that spotlights the Muslim communities of Brooklyn***

July 10, 2017 Brooklyn, NY—Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS) is honored to receive a \$200,000 award from the Ford Foundation to fund its forthcoming public history project, *Muslims in Brooklyn*. Designed to amplify the stories of Brooklyn’s Muslim communities and contextualize those stories in the broader history of Brooklyn, this multi-faceted initiative will challenge assumptions and promote new insights and understanding about Brooklyn’s rich ethnic and religious heritage.

For well over a century, Muslims have lived, worked, and prayed in Brooklyn, making it a major center of Muslim life for New York City and the nation. From the earliest known prayer hall in 1907, to nearly 100 mosques reported in 2015, Brooklyn now boasts more Muslim houses of worship than any other borough in New York City—one of the highest concentrations of mosques in any one area in the nation. With the increase of anti-Muslim rhetoric in national discourse and a sharp rise in bias incidents, this project takes on new urgency for an institution whose mission is to promote the critical role of history in understanding the present.

This significant funding from the Ford Foundation will enable BHS to produce an oral history collection, an interpretive website, an art-focused exhibition, a robust educational curriculum, dynamic public programming, dedicated segments of its podcast *Flatbush + Main*, and a comprehensive publication.

*Muslims in Brooklyn* will be led by BHS Oral Historian, Zaheer Ali, a scholar of the history of Islam in New York City, who previously managed the Malcolm X Project at Columbia University.

Deborah Schwartz, President of the Brooklyn Historical Society notes that “the history of Brooklyn’s Muslim communities is woefully absent from the general descriptions of who and what Brooklyn is all about, from our textbooks, our socio-political discourse, and even largely from the media. There is no better place to remedy this situation than Brooklyn Historical Society, where we are dedicated to the stories of all Brooklynites—past and present. The story of Muslims in Brooklyn is not a monolithic story—this history includes diverse communities of African Americans as well as immigrants from all over the world—people who have arrived here over centuries, for multiple reasons, and whose struggles, aspirations, and creative contributions are unique and impressive. Brooklyn Historical Society is honored that the Ford Foundation has seen the importance of gathering these stories, and providing space for discourse, programs and exhibitions that begin to correct and reshape the historical record.”

“Freedom of religion is embedded in our laws and our cultural life - but we must be vigilant about preserving these rights,” said Elizabeth Alexander, Director of Creativity & Free Expression at Ford Foundation.

“Brooklyn Historical Society is leading the way by raising the visibility of the Muslim faith, highlighting the rich traditions and practices of Muslim communities in Brooklyn. We value this affirmation, especially during these challenging times, and the opportunity to educate the public about the diversity and vibrancy of our Muslim neighbors throughout Brooklyn, and beyond.”

For more information about *Muslims in Brooklyn*, visit: <http://brooklynhistory.org/muslimsinbrooklyn>

### **About Brooklyn Historical Society**

Founded in 1863, Brooklyn Historical Society is a nationally recognized urban history center dedicated to preserving and encouraging the study of Brooklyn's extraordinary 400-year history. Located in Brooklyn Heights and housed in a magnificent landmark building designed by George Post and opened in 1881, today's BHS is a cultural hub for civic dialogue, thoughtful engagement and community outreach. In May 2017 BHS opened a second site in DUMBO's Brooklyn Bridge Park.

### **About Ford Foundation**

The Ford Foundation is an independent, nonprofit grant-making organization. For more than 80 years it has worked with courageous people on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. With headquarters in New York, the Foundation has offices in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

###