

Religious historian, Muslim womanist Debra Majeed dies at 68

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [April 20, 2022](#) issue



(Photo by Greg Anderson Photography)

Religious historian and Muslim womanist Debra Majeed died on March 20 from complications following surgery. She was 68.

Before becoming a full-time scholar, Majeed served as a United Methodist minister. She converted to Islam in 1998 while researching the appeal of Islam to Black Americans in Chicago as part of a joint doctorate program at Northwestern University and Garrett-Evangelical Seminary.

She would later say that she came to embrace Islam because of the “pious, charitable, loving Muslim women and men” whom she met during her research.

Because Islam does not permit women to lead mixed-sex mosques, Majeed turned to the academy. After a brief stint teaching American religion at Loyola University Chicago, in 1999 she accepted a position teaching philosophy and religious studies at Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. She remained there until her retirement in 2020 and was the first Black woman and first Muslim at Beloit College to receive tenure.

Majeed is perhaps best known for her research on polygyny among Black American Muslims. Her groundbreaking book *Polygyny: What It Means When African American Muslim Women Share Their Husbands*, published in 2016, examined the legal and communal effects of multiple-wife marriage and encouraged Muslim communities to develop formal policies to protect the women and children not recognized by the state.

Her dedication to social justice inspired those around her. In addition to teaching her students about civil rights in innovative ways, Majeed was a certified legal advocate for abused and neglected children. After her retirement, Majeed moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, and founded Queen City Family Advocates, a grassroots initiative to improve the health and well-being of families in Charlotte.

Following the news of Majeed's death, Kameelah Rashad, founder of the Muslim Wellness Foundation, tweeted that Majeed had been a trailblazer.

"Her sudden passing is heartbreaking, yet her legacy is tremendous."