



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Part I: Assuming Islam Is the Cause of Terrorism

Chapter 1: The True Roots of Terrorism

1. Do you believe that our religious beliefs can be separated from our political beliefs? Or do they mutually influence one another? Why might this matter for an understanding of the role that religion plays in terrorism?
2. How do we make sense of the fact that many people who join terrorist organizations such as ISIS or al-Qaeda know little about Islam? What does this reality tell us about Islam's role in terrorism?
3. The majority of terrorist attacks in the United States are perpetrated by non-Muslims. Why do you think politicians and the media give disproportionate attention to Muslims who commit terrorist acts given this reality?

Chapter 2: Monitoring, Managing, and Maligning Muslims

1. Not long after the 9/11 attacks, the US government implemented a registration program, NSEERS, that targeted non-immigrant Muslim men who sought to enter the country. In the end, the program yielded zero terrorist convictions, and it was suspended in 2011. Why do you think NSEERS failed to capture potential terrorists? What possible assumptions about Muslims were driving the program that contributed to its failure?
2. The NYPD's radicalization model presupposed that greater religiosity—growing a beard, refraining from drinking alcohol—was a potential indicator that a Muslim was on the path to becoming radicalized. What do you think explains the NYPD's decision to link such nonviolent practices with violent extremism? What double standards might be at work in this assumption compared to comparable behavior from members of other religious communities?
3. Anti-Muslim rhetoric increased significantly in election cycles beginning in 2015. Much of this rhetoric came from politicians whose ambitions seemed unhindered and undamaged from promoting anti-Muslim views. Do you think these politicians performed well among the electorate in spite of Islamophobia or because of it?



Part II: Ignoring Muslims Who Condemn Terrorism

Chapter 3: Muslims Speak Out

1. Why are many white Americans and white Christians given the benefit of the doubt when someone who shares their racial or religious background engages in unjust violence?
2. This chapter offers overwhelming evidence of Muslims speaking out against terrorism. Why do you think so many non-Muslims are unaware of these condemnations? Were you aware of these condemnations before reading this chapter? If so, how did you learn about them? If not, what explains your lack of knowledge about these condemnations?
3. Of the different reasons offered by Muslims for speaking out against terrorism, is there one that you found surprising or unexpected? If so, which one and why?

Chapter 4: Muslims Take Action

1. Muslims have served in the armed forces on both sides of the Atlantic for more than a century. How might stories of this service help counter the narrative that Muslims are anti-American or anti-European and are doing little to combat terrorism?
2. Is there a potential danger in emphasizing stories of Muslims serving in the military or in law enforcement agencies? Does this perpetuate a belief that “good Muslims”—Muslims who are acceptable—are the ones who put on a uniform and devote their careers to combating terrorism, whereas other Muslims remain objects of suspicion?
3. After the Brussels attacks and the Pulse nightclub shooting in 2016, Donald Trump complained that Muslims don’t report suspicious behavior from other Muslims when they encounter it. Studies indicate that Trump was flat-out wrong, and some prominent politicians and law enforcement officials came out and indicated as much.

Do you think Trump deliberately made this claim in order to stir up suspicion and animosity toward Muslims? Was he purposely tapping into preexisting assumptions that Muslims are sympathetic to terrorism to score political points? Or do you think Trump made this statement in ignorance and simply didn’t know the degree to which Muslims cooperate with law enforcement officials in reporting suspicious behavior?



Part III: Diverting Attention from Western Violence

Chapter 5: The Sins of the Fathers

1. What do you think explains the backlash to Obama's National Prayer Breakfast speech and his reference to violence committed by Christians?
2. How prevalent do you think it is in America to view the War on Terror and other military actions as reflecting God's will?
3. Both Jews and Muslims were subject to widescale expulsions as a result of the Spanish Inquisition. Do you think there is a connection between anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim sentiment historically? If so, what is this connection?

Chapter 6: A Written Memorial

1. What explains the United States' reluctance to memorialize victims of racial violence? Why is it easier to solicit popular support for the 9/11 Memorial Museum than it is for memorials to slavery or lynching?
2. There is plenty of evidence pointing to Christian justifications for slavery in nineteenth-century America. What does this say about the relationship between Christianity and slavery? What sort of light might this relationship shed on the relationship between Islam and terrorism in the twenty-first century?
3. In 2014, President Obama commented: "We tortured some folks. We did some things that were contrary to our values." Based on the modern history of torture discussed in chapter 6, from the Phoenix Program to the School of the Americas to the War on Terror, how would you evaluate Obama's claim? Is torture contrary to American values, or is it reflective of American values? What explains the high support for torture from white Christians in America?

Chapter 7: Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story

1. What explains the reluctance of many Americans to acknowledge the genocide of Native Americans?



2. In light of the role Christians played in both the Native American genocide and the Holocaust, do you think contemporary Christians should publicly denounce this history and make amends for these past atrocities?
3. Why do many Americans, including politicians, show a reluctance to condemn the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or even to raise moral questions about the bombings? What does the ongoing popular support for these bombings say about broader American attitudes toward the morality of targeting civilians in acts of war?

Conclusion: Assuming the Best of Our Muslim Neighbors

1. Can you identify an instance in which someone of another religion, or of a different denomination within your religion, made assumptions about your religious beliefs or worldview that were uninformed or even offensive?
2. Can you recall a time in which someone of a different religion, or of a different denomination within your religion, unfairly compared the best of their religion with the worst of yours?
3. Can you name some element of a different religion—any religion—that inspires “holy envy” in you?