Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies

EBOO PATEL

THERE HAS BEEN DRAMATIC GROWTH in interfaith activity over the past twenty years, no doubt linked to the increasing diversity many people are now experiencing and to the prevalence of high-profile religious extremism and conflict. A half century ago, few cities had any organized interfaith programs. Today, dozens have some sort of initiative, everything from interfaith councils to festivals of faith. Religious denominations have invited leaders from other religions to give keynotes at their gatherings, and local congregations have started interfaith exchange programs. Think tanks have commissioned task forces and issued reports. The United Nations has launched a major interfaith initiative called the Alliance of Civilizations. Muslim and Christian theologians have unveiled a document called "A Common Word Between Us and You." Celebrated world religions author Karen Armstrong has used her TED prize to issue a "Charter of Compassion," calling all religions to redefine themselves by that shared, core value. Princes, prime ministers, and presidents have all, in various ways, lent their support to the interfaith cause.

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I've been involved in interfaith work for some fifteen years, most of that time as founder and president of an organization called Interfaith Youth Core, which partners with college campuses on interfaith programs. When I was just starting out in the late 1990s, and whenever I happened to mention the term "interfaith" to someone, I mostly got met with a blank stare. When I tell someone now that I run an interfaith organization, there's a good chance that I'm met with a knowing look, followed by a dizzying range of responses, such as "It's so great that you are working to support people's spiritual journeys" or "I believe in all religions too" or "I'm glad someone is out there standing up for morality." We've gone from no recognition of a term to a hundred different definitions, some of them contradictory.

Scholars from a range of fields have long taken an interest in how people who orient around religion differently interact with one another. Indeed, this phenomenon has been the subject of important works in political science (*The Clash of Civilizations* by Samuel Huntington), sociology (*American Grace* by Robert Putnam and David Campbell) and religion and theology (*No Other Name?* by Paul Knitter). As the activity in this area increases, one crucial role for the academy is to give some definition to what is clearly an emerging field of research, study, and practice. Another role is to recognize the importance of training people who have the knowledge base and skill set needed to engage religious diversity in a way that promotes peace, stability, and cooperation—and to begin offering academic programs that certify such leaders. What follows is my attempt to define the contours of "interfaith studies" and to give it some shape by articulating what a course of study in this field might look like.

Interfaith studies

As an academic field, interfaith studies would examine the multiple dimensions of how individuals and groups who orient around religion differently interact with one another, along with the implications of this interactions for communities, civil society, and global politics. Clearly, it would be an interdisciplinary field. A psychologist might research how individuals who grow up in a religiously homogenous environment

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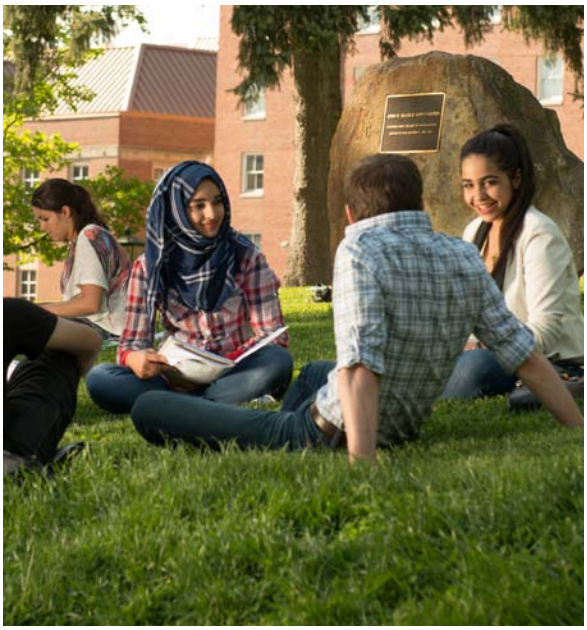
experience and cope with moving to religiously diverse surroundings. A political scientist could study why some nations have been more effective than others in absorbing religious minorities, or why politics is dominated by religion in some states and not in others (or perhaps the relationship between the two). A historian would draw parallels between the relatively tolerant empires of medieval Islam and contemporary North America. A sociologist might look at the role religious institutions play in assimilating immigrants. Philosophers might compare theories of pluralism, theologians would elucidate how to be Christian or Muslim or Jewish amongst "others," professors of art and literature could choose to examine any of a thousand great works that have been created at the crossroads of religious imaginations.



Ohio University

Without a doubt, research projects such as these already exist in the academy. But they are disconnected—published in separate journals and discussed independently of one another at different conferences and in different departments. Academic fields are useful because they are formal spaces for a group of colleagues to engage in long-term data gathering, sustained reflection, and extended discussion. It is a question not only of collecting things, but of connecting them and cooperating together to decide what they might mean and how to apply key lessons. Consider similar areas that have become fields, gathering scholars from different disciplines to inquire, connect, and apply—urban studies, human and family studies, education, community development, social work.

One thing that unites the fields I've mentioned is a strong practitioner dimension. Scholars in these areas ask and pursue critical research questions, but they also create programs of study that shape leaders who "do" in their areas. Social work departments educate social workers, education departments train teachers, urban studies departments train city managers, and so on. A major part of what interfaith studies would be about is nurturing a cadre of professionals, a group that I'm calling interfaith leaders. I'm defining an interfaith leader as someone with the framework, knowledge base, and skill set needed to help individuals and communities who orient around religion differently in civil society and politics build mutual respect, positive relationships, and a commitment to the common good. Put simply, an effective interfaith leader is one who can work with diversity to build pluralism.

Like Harvard University Professor Diana Eck, I define diversity as simply the fact of people and groups with different identities living in close quarters. Pluralism, according to Eck, is an achievement—it is the proactive engagement of this diversity toward positive ends. My own definition of pluralism has three parts: respect for different identities, positive relationships between diverse communities, and a collective commitment to the common good. Diverse societies that achieve pluralism have a strong civic fabric—one that can withstand the provocations of extremists and haters—and bridge their social capital in ways that can take on some of their toughest social problems. But bridges don't fall from the sky or rise from the ground; people build them. And the people who are on the vanguard of such work, we call leaders.

A curriculum for developing interfaith leaders

What kind of academic program could educate and train interfaith leaders? For the purposes of this discussion, I'm imagining a concentration in an undergraduate program—a course sequence a student might take as part of a major in religion, political science, or international relations. The foundational course would be called "Religious Diversity, Civil Society, and World Politics," and the first text that would be taught is Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. The first assignment would to be to read Huntington alongside a weeks' worth of the *New York Times* and come to class prepared to argue against his thesis. If it is a typically bloody week, there will be far more that seems to illustrate Huntington's ideas than disprove them.

This discussion would hopefully raise a series of questions that the rest of the coursework would attempt to answer. The first question is about religious trends. Huntington was one of the first prominent academics to say that the

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secularization theory was bunk, that religious identity was deeply ingrained in the human condition, and that most of humanity was likely to identify most closely with their faith for the foreseeable future. So twenty years after the *Clash of Civilizations*, what do we know about trends in religious identification? That is, what do we know not simply about the number of adherents of different religions across the globe, but also about diversity within cities, nations, and regions and about how people's religious orientations shape their attitudes toward everything from polio vaccines to the separation of church and state to girls' schooling? How devout and how diverse is our chosen area of interest, and how much is that likely to matter for issues of peace and stability?

The second question the Huntington conversation would be likely to raise is whether conflict between communities that orient around religion differently is in fact inevitable, as Huntington suggests. The third question is related to the second: if religious violence is not inevitable, then in what situations have diverse communities coexisted and even cooperated? This question is best answered through the literature of three disciplines. One is history—simply reading about the instances where diversity has become coexistence or cooperation. Some of my favorites include Maria Rosa Menocal's *The Ornament of the World* about medieval Andalusia and Zachary Karabell's *Peace Be upon You*.

A second discipline that helps answer this question is political science. I think political theory raises the hardest and most important question when it comes to religious diversity, namely, under what political and social conditions can communities who have very different ideas of what is good and lawful on Earth, based on a set of cosmic convictions, live together in the same society? To give just one example, many Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains believe that all of life—including all animals and some vegetables—is holy and should be unharmed. They live together in India with about 140 million Muslims who believe that slaughtering goats on certain days is holy and that eating meat on most other days a very good idea. How can these groups with such basic differences anchored in cosmic convictions be expected to share a society together? These are the kinds of questions that the political theorists Michael Walzer, Alfred Stepan, and John Courtney Murray have explored.

Finally, sociology. What do we know from people doing empirical work, both ethnographic and quantitative, about how communities who orient differently around religion might get along? Robert Putnam and David Campbell's *American Grace* asks how America, as a nation that is both religiously diverse and religiously devout, has remained largely tolerant, even during times of religious tension and conflict elsewhere. Karl Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac's *Pax Ethnica* takes an ethnographic look at a range of highly diverse cities around the world and asks what makes places like Flushing or Marseille largely cooperative? Brown University Professor Ashutosh Varshney has a hugely important study of India called *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* in which he asks why some cities in India remain calm during times of communal tension and others erupt in violent conflict. The answer is surprisingly simple: the single biggest difference between stability and violence seems to be attributable to whether or not civic networks (Rotary Clubs and the like) exist within a city and bring people from different backgrounds together on a regular basis. That answer, incidentally, highlights why I am calling this a program in interfaith leadership. Civic networks that bring diverse people together don't fall from the sky; they are built and maintained by leaders.

A second course would be "Case Studies in Religious Violence and Interfaith Peacebuilding." This course would present actual instances of religious diversity becoming either conflict or cooperation and analyzing the role that leaders played in either fanning the flames of conflict or building the bridges of cooperation. Texts would include the multi-volume *Fundamentalism Project* by Scott Appleby and Martin Marty, David Smock's *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, and interfaith case studies developed by Harvard University's Pluralism Project. Key leadership texts by scholars like Ronald Heifetz and Howard Gardner would also be employed.

Case studies would include everything from how Osama bin Laden mobilized a set of Muslims to build a religious extremist organization to how Martin Luther King Jr. mobilized racially and religiously diverse people to build the civil rights movement. Some cases would come right

off the front pages of the *New York Times*, and students would be asked questions like the following: if you were in Grand Island, Nebraska, when Latino and African American Christians staged a walkout of a factory because the Somali Muslims workers had recently won a schedule change to accommodate Ramadan hours, how would you lead? That question—how would you lead?—would be at the heart of all the discussions in this class. Akin to the Harvard Business School case-study model, which presents students with real-life situations faced by companies and asks them what they would do if they were in charge, this course would constantly be asking the students how they would strengthen interfaith cooperation in particular situations when diversity seems to be tending toward conflict.

A third course I would require is something along the lines of "Perspectives in Religion." In some ways, this would be like the typical course offered in most religious studies departments on the nature of religion, with readings by Jose Casanova, Talal Assad, Clifford Geertz, Mircea Eliade, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Marshall Hodgson, Peter Berger, Rudolph Otto, Paul Tillich, Huston Smith, Stephen Prothero, and the classics—Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. Students would examine various theories of religion. Students would be asked to consider Otto's notion that at the center of religion is an experience that is wholly other, something he called "the numinous," and Tillich's view that religion is about ultimate concerns. They'd consider Cantwell Smith's view that religion is best understood as cumulative historical traditions, that the term "faith" is best defined as the relationship that individuals and communities have with various dimensions of that tradition, as well as Berger's emphasis on institutions as the "plausibility structures" that create patterns of activity in human life and his key insight that modernity pluralizes—moving personal identity from fate to choice, making the internal life of human beings far more complex now than in premodern times. Students would put scholars like Huston Smith and Stephen Prothero into dialogue with each other, exploring whether religions are actually quite similar (as Smith suggests) or really very different (as Prothero writes) from one another. This course would widen perspectives and debunk common myths, like the idea that sacred scripture somehow gets up and walks around by itself, with no assistance from human interpreters.

The final course I would require is "Theologies of Interfaith Cooperation." Students would read theologians and ethicists from a range of faiths—including secular humanism—who advance interpretations and narratives of their traditions that speak to building positive relationships with "the other." This would include Khaled Abou El Fadl, Farid Esack, Umar Abd-Allah, Fazlur Rahman, and Ingrid Mattson out of Islam; Jonathan Sacks, Or Rose, Marc Gopin, and Abraham Joshua Heschel out of Judaism; Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda from Hinduism; Paul Knitter and Hans Kung from Catholicism; and Miroslav Volf and Brian McLaren from Protestant Evangelical Christianity. The course would focus on the key question of how theologians from a range of traditions have stitched together interpretations of scripture, stories, heroes, and historical moments from their key sources in order to articulate a coherent narrative of positive relationship with the religious other.

The course would also explore how theologians navigate challenging and complex questions. What do Jewish theologians do with the idea of "chosenness" in relating to "the religious other"? How do Evangelicals view the idea of Christ as the exclusive path to salvation in light of admiring the spiritual example of someone like the Dalai Lama or Gandhi? The core idea here is that positive relations between those who orient around religion differently do not require leaving religion aside. Some of the greatest interfaith leaders of the twentieth century—Gandhi and King to name two obvious ones—built bridges with people of other faiths precisely because of their respective Hindu and Christian faiths, not despite them. Interfaith leaders need to be fluent in the theology of interfaith cooperation of their own tradition, and literate in such theologies in other traditions.

After this four-course sequence, I would require two electives that could be chosen from a range of options. Some students might want to do a deeper dive into religion by taking courses in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc. Some might want to focus on a particular region, say South Asia or the Middle East. Students would also choose between two options for their capstone projects. The first option would be to design and implement a

local interfaith project that puts into practice key theories and skills of interfaith leadership learned through coursework. The second option would be to write a program proposal for dealing with an interfaith challenge elsewhere in the country or the world. The key requirement in both cases would be that the students make use of interfaith leaders in civil society to build pluralism out of diversity.

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The public dimension of religion

I think it is fair to say that most of the current interest in interfaith cooperation is rooted in the personal, the pastoral, and the spiritual. Questions about one's own religious or spiritual identity in relation to others are always highly salient at interfaith gatherings and in much of the literature about interfaith work. The program of study I outline above begins from a different starting place, however. It is about the civic and political more than the personal. The emphasis is on the public dimension of religion—how its narratives promote conflict or cooperation, how its social capital can be mobilized toward violence or community building. I have no doubt that people who want to reflect upon their personal spiritual journeys would find much of interest in this program, but it leans toward preparation for leadership in a world of religious diversity. It would, I believe, be good training for a range of professional paths.

In her book *The Mighty and the Almighty*, former Secretary of State Madeline Albright wrote, "When I was secretary of state, I had an entire bureau of economic experts I could turn to, and a cadre of experts on nonproliferation and arms control. . . . I did not have similar expertise available for integrating religious principles into our efforts at diplomacy" (2006, 75). It is an important reminder that, ultimately, it's not paradigms that carry out foreign policy; it's people. The State Department is one place that I think ought to be interested in hiring leaders trained in interfaith studies, but it's far from the only place. Staff of international development organizations attempting to spread polio vaccines in South Asia or antimalarial bed nets in sub-Saharan Africa better be aware of the religious energies in those places. YMCA executive directors and school principals in inner city Minneapolis would do well to know something about the faith practices of the Somali Muslims, Hmong Shamanists, and Native Americans of the area. City officials in rapidly diversifying cities like Atlanta, Houston, and Birmingham should have some knowledge of the Hindu customs of their Indian populations. And it would be a double tragedy if the first time that journalists from Milwaukee news outlets visited the local Sikh temple was in the immediate aftermath of a white supremacist shooting six people there. □

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author's name on the subject line.

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EBOO PATEL, KATIE BRINGMAN BAXTER, AND NOAH SILVERMAN

Leadership Practices for Interfaith Excellence in Higher Education

THE RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS of higher education are changing rapidly. College campuses have become prime sites for conflicts involving religious identity. Many such stories have made national news—polarizing debates about Israel/Palestine, frustration by campus religious groups regarding "all comers" policies, the emergence of a strand of atheism that is overtly hostile to religion.[1] Furthermore, the religious demographics of student bodies across the country have shifted drastically, even at religiously affiliated schools. Take Augsburg College as an example. Founded as the first higher education institution of what would become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Augsburg is today reflective of the broad diversity of its home city of Minneapolis. President Paul Pribbenow has observed that Augsburg College is located in the most diverse zip code between Chicago and Los Angeles. The student body includes members of the local Somali Muslim, Hmong, and Native American communities; students of color constitute 30 percent of the student body, and Lutherans only 20 percent.

Knowing what leads to excellent campus-based interfaith engagement is important for ensuring that American colleges and universities deliver on the enduring goals of liberal education

Such dynamics are only one dimension of what Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen call "pluriform religion" in their recent book, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*. They claim that the era in which religion was privatized and went unengaged on campuses is coming to an end. The combination of increased religious diversity on campuses, the embrace of multiculturalism by higher education more broadly, and the visibility of religious controversy in global politics has made the proactive and positive engagement of interfaith issues a necessity. The Jacobsens explain that "paying attention to religion in higher education today is not at all a matter of imposing faith or morality on anyone; it is a matter of responding intelligently to the questions of life that students find themselves necessarily asking as they try to make sense of themselves and the world in an era of ever-increasing social, intellectual and religious complexity."[2]

As part of its Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has set the standard for liberal education in the twenty-first century: "Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change . . . [in] the wider world . . . [and] helps students develop a sense of social responsibility."[3] Few issues touch more broadly or more deeply on complexity, diversity, and change in the twenty-first-century world than those related to how people who orient differently around religion interact with one another. Interfaith cooperation in higher education thus ought not to be the pet project of a handful of colleagues who attend niche gatherings; rather, as the Jacobsens argue, it is one of the keys to fulfilling higher education's mission as a social institution that nurtures leaders and enriches a diverse body politic. Given these stakes, knowing what leads to excellent campus-based interfaith engagement is important for ensuring that American colleges and universities deliver on the enduring goals of liberal education itself.

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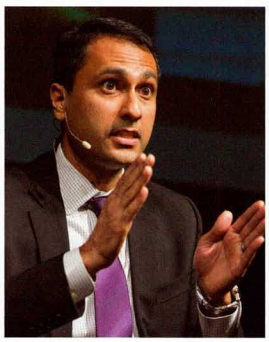
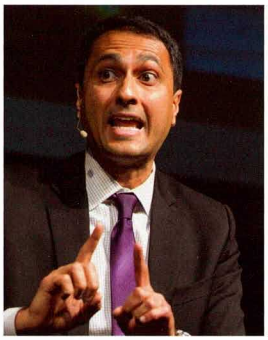
AAC&U Annual Meeting

Higher education is well equipped to take on this charge. America's college campuses have long set the educational and civic agenda for the nation on issues such as multiculturalism, volunteerism, and environmentalism. College campuses are social laboratories where a range of interfaith strategies can be tested; faculty can help create the necessary knowledge base to support and guide interfaith engagement, and higher education can make it a priority to nurture interfaith leaders, much as it has done with multicultural leaders. Of course, many college campuses have been doing some version of this on an ad hoc basis for many years. Chaplains and deans of religious life have worked to accommodate the spiritual needs of Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, humanist, and other minority traditions. Students have launched interfaith clubs and councils. Courses focusing on interactions between different religious identities have emerged in a variety of departments, and faculty have written scholarly works on the subject.

Eboo Patel, AAC&U Annual Meeting





As this type of activity grows, it is useful to ask what strategies, or combinations of strategies, are most effective in interfaith work. In other words, what does excellence look like when it comes to the engagement of religious diversity on a college or university campus? Is it possible to identify best practices, analogous to the "LEAP high-impact practices" identified by AAC&U,[4] that could be used as benchmarks or to orient future strategic planning in this area?

What does excellence look like when it comes to the engagement of religious diversity on a college or university campus?

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), a Chicago-based nonprofit organization, began working with colleges and universities on interfaith programs after the events of September 11, 2001. Since then, the organization has partnered with over four hundred institutions on interfaith programming, hosted over three hundred campus delegations at interfaith leadership institutes, provided speakers to give keynote addresses on one hundred campuses, and partnered with twenty-five campuses on in-depth engagement consultations. In sifting through this experience in the field, it is possible to discern patterns of effectiveness. Notwithstanding the particularities of individual institutional contexts, there are clear commonalities among the most successful campus efforts—what we have come to call the "leadership practices for interfaith excellence in higher education."

It is worth noting that the articulation of these practices is not the result of a rigorous study of interfaith work in higher education. Such a study is actually being launched (see below), but the results are several years away. Instead, compiled here are the insights of three experienced practitioners who work at Interfaith Youth Core and have partnered with practitioners on campuses across the country. Consequently, the best way to approach the practices described below is as a set of hypotheses to be tested and analyzed.

Leadership practices for interfaith excellence

Presented below are brief synopses of nine "leadership practices" that have emerged from Interfaith Youth Core's experience, along with a brief example of how each has been embedded within a campus in the IFYC network. Since the practices are intentionally aspirational, the examples chosen do not necessarily represent the highest form of the practice; rather, they are meant to be illustrative.

The practices overlap to varying degrees, but two themes are clear across all nine. First, each of these practices is most effective when pursued with a commitment to both *breadth* (large percentages of the campus community having at least minimal exposure) and *depth* (select groups of the community having the opportunity to explore these issues in detail). Second, none of the practices is a "stand-alone"; they are best pursued in some combination. Campuses ought to start where they have existing strengths and positive energy, and grow from there.

1. Establishing links to institutional identity and mission. To promote effective campus engagement with religious diversity, it is essential that the priority of interfaith cooperation be directly linked to the institution's mission, values, and identity. A campus might consider how the institution's religious or historical identity makes salient the need for interfaith cooperation. Students should know that part of the institution's mission is to graduate global and civic leaders who

have had experience with interfaith cooperation and have developed interfaith literacy.

For example, the President's Interfaith Advisory Council at Concordia College has crafted a Lutheran identity statement, which says that "Concordia College practices interfaith cooperation because of its Lutheran dedication to prepare thoughtful and informed global citizens who foster wholeness and hope, cultivate peace through understanding, and serve the world together." The statement links interfaith cooperation directly to Concordia's mission as a Lutheran college and explicitly defines the college's commitment. The Lutheran identity statement helps faculty, staff, students, and friends of the college understand that Concordia is committed to interfaith cooperation *because of*, not *in spite of*, its Lutheran identity.

2. *Developing a campus-wide strategy*. An individual college or university's plan for promoting interfaith engagement flows from its mission and guides the campus as it tries to live into its vision across the curriculum and cocurriculum. The creation of internal guiding documents—vision statements, strategic plans, statements of campus-wide learning goals—is a key way to demonstrate that interfaith cooperation is an institutional priority. A campus might, for example, make it a goal to increase the religious diversity of the student body, convene a cross-campus interfaith cooperation committee made up of a range of stakeholders, or identify and measure campus-wide learning outcomes for all students. No matter the goal, the strategic integration of the curricular and the cocurricular fosters educational experiences that are likely to have a significant impact on students.

Elon University's intentional, layered plan for multi-faith engagement is exemplary in this regard. Embedded within the first theme of "The Elon Commitment," the university's strategic plan, is a commitment to "build a multi-faith center and promote interfaith dialogue." With respect to the creation of a center, the planning process was led by a special "religious houses and multi-faith center" committee. Additionally, a team of staff and faculty recently completed a new strategic plan specifically to guide the work of the center and the broader campus initiative. As a result, Elon has a clear roadmap for achieving its goals related to multi-faith engagement.

3. *Creating a public identity*. A campus's public interfaith identity complements its internal strategy. External communications and marketing materials can be used to highlight interfaith initiatives, and they should represent people from an array of religious backgrounds. In addition, high-profile community events focused on interfaith cooperation and public relations opportunities, such as the invitation of religiously diverse convocation speakers and the award of honorary degrees to religiously diverse recipients, convey the campus's priorities to external constituents.

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Loyola University Chicago's recent "a home for all faiths" marketing campaign exemplifies this practice. The university used eye-catching advertisements—displayed on busses and kiosks across the city—to express its commitment to a religiously diverse student body, thereby encouraging students from many backgrounds to apply for admission. The slogan "a home for all faiths" appeared in large print across the city, letting locals know that Loyola might be a place for them, whether they're Catholic or not. This very public statement about Loyola's commitment to inclusion helps the university sustain its inclusive and religiously diverse campus community.

4. *Respecting and accommodating diverse religious identities*. The foundation for interfaith programming rests on both respect for the religious (or nonreligious) identity of all members of the community and reasonable accommodations related to how individuals live out their traditions in daily life. To this end, it is important that campus policies be instituted that address issues of religious accommodation, that strides be taken to communicate these policies, and that procedures be established by which new requests can be made and addressed. Many campuses have recognized the need to build multiple or multipurpose prayer spaces to accommodate the increasing diversity of religious expression, as well as to establish dining options that meet students' dietary needs.

Utah Valley University is a public institution with more than thirty thousand students, 80 percent of whom are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). The university recently opened an interfaith reflection center in the heart of its campus. Faculty and staff had seen students—mostly Muslim students—praying in bathrooms and other corners of the campus, and knew a welcoming

public space was necessary if they were to be honest about meeting the needs of their student body. Therefore, Utah Valley's president, himself a member of the LDS church, approved a new wellness building on the condition that it include a space that would be open to students of all faith traditions. This interfaith reflection center demonstrates the university's commitment to respecting and accommodating the full array of students' religious identities.

5. *Making interfaith cooperation an academic priority.* Increasingly, scholars from a variety of disciplines are recognizing the importance of interfaith cooperation as a subject of academic research, analysis, and instruction. Many colleges and universities have launched courses and course sequences in interfaith studies that are designed to train students to examine the multiple dimensions of interactions among individuals and groups who orient around religion differently and the implications of these interactions for communities, civil society, and global politics. In addition to supporting scholarly pursuits, the investment of institutional resources in faculty development—focused on the pedagogy of this nascent field as well as responding to the dynamics of a religiously diverse classroom—is an important component of this practice.

Higher education movements lack "legs" if students are not committed or invested

Dominican University exemplifies a broad and deep approach to this leadership practice. Since 2011, Dominican has required all first-year and sophomore students to read an interfaith-themed text in their liberal arts and sciences seminars. This means that texts presenting a variety of religious viewpoints—*Living Buddha, Living Christ* by Thich Nacht Hahn and *Encountering God* by Diana Eck—are read across disciplines and from multiple perspectives. In addition to these common seminar texts, faculty in the theology department are preparing to launch an interfaith studies minor. This multipronged approach ensures that Dominican students can access interfaith theory and concepts in multiple ways across the curriculum.

6. *Building competence and capacity among staff and faculty members.* Professional staff members and faculty do much to shape the campus climate and the student experience. Staff and faculty development opportunities, staff and faculty understanding of interfaith issues and religious diversity among the student body, and staff positions dedicated to interfaith cooperation—all can contribute to a positive climate for people of diverse religious identities.

Berea College has been supporting interfaith student engagement and student leadership for many years. A desire to reach more students and make the commitment more sustainable led Berea to equip key staff people across student life. Student life personnel were asked to train resident assistants, student chaplains, service-learning leaders, and others in interfaith cooperation and how to engage religious diversity. In addition to providing structured workshops and training sessions, the approach helped the staff members involved to increase their fluency and comfort in engaging religious diversity and interfaith cooperation more broadly.

7. *Encouraging student leadership.* Higher education movements lack "legs" if students are not committed or invested, and young interfaith leaders do not emerge unless they have civic spaces within which to develop. Campus structures that support interfaith student leadership also contribute to effective student learning, promote program sustainability, and ensure that a variety of opportunities are available to students interested in interfaith leadership.

The interfaith scholars program at DePaul University exemplifies campus efforts to encourage interfaith student leadership. Scholars are chosen through a competitive application process and are representative of the student body in a number of ways, including in terms of religious diversity. Once selected, they are asked to develop their own interfaith leadership skills, build intentional relationships with one another, facilitate activities and programs for their peers, and reflect on their learning and growth. The scholars host regular dialogues and discussions that can engage hundreds of students.

8. *Engaging in campus-community partnerships.* Effective interfaith engagement requires practice, in addition to theoretical knowledge. Often, practice occurs beyond the boundaries of a campus in the form of service-learning experiences, internships, off-campus study, or other experiential education opportunities that engage students in interfaith civic engagement. These opportunities are most sustainable and effective when they draw on intentional and mutually beneficial relationships between the campus and local religious or civic organizations.

Elizabethtown College is attuned to this practice in all aspects of its cocurricular interfaith work. The college chaplains lead off-campus

visits to sacred spaces and faith-based spring break service trips, and provide guidance and advising to Elizabethtown's service-focused "Better Together" interfaith student group. In addition, Elizabethtown students may be selected as undergraduate fellows in ethical leadership, a program that emphasizes interfaith leadership. The fellows focus on networking, integrating life and work, and reflecting on experiences such as internships and volunteer service. Through these efforts, Elizabethtown is leveraging community relationships in order to help students take their interfaith leadership into "real life."

9. *Assessing campus climates and interfaith initiatives*. Interfaith cooperation is a relatively new phenomenon and, accordingly, intentional analysis and assessment are required to determine outcomes and goals, best practices, and efficacy. Campus climates and interfaith initiatives should be assessed regularly, and the findings should be used to guide ongoing improvement and strategic planning. Those involved in efforts to promote interfaith cooperation should never stop asking, "What are we trying to achieve, and how do we know whether what we are doing is having the intended effect?"

A rigorous scholarly assessment of interfaith effectiveness and experience is currently being launched. Developed by Matt Mayhew of New York University and Alyssa Rockenbach of North Carolina State University, the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS) is a five-year study of interfaith strategies in higher education. The initiative will include over 150 participating campuses—a broad cross-section of American higher education—and will survey students at three points in their college careers: at the start of the first year, after the first year, and at the end of the college experience. The purpose of the study is to discern the impact that campus programs and student experiences have on key interfaith outcomes, such as knowledge about different traditions and attitudes toward religiously diverse people. IDEALS will provide data about individual campuses, particular segments within higher education (large public universities in the Midwest, for example), and higher education as a whole.

Conclusion

As University of La Verne President Devorah Lieberman often remarks as she considers the growing interfaith work on her own campus, "This isn't rocket science. It's harder." There is no silver bullet or single programmatic prescription that can guarantee interfaith excellence. Developing a campus culture of religious pluralism is painstaking, long-term work. Our hope is that the leadership practices described above will offer campus practitioners a useful framework for implementing their own interfaith goals and aspirations.

While the above list, as stated earlier, should be regarded as a set of hypotheses compiled by experienced practitioners, we would like to emphasize that there is a profound benefit for the broader society when colleges and universities embrace and apply these leadership practices as part of a liberal education. Campuses are positioned to serve as laboratories for interfaith cooperation, to make interfaith cooperation a broader civic priority, to nurture a generation of interfaith leaders, and to advance a knowledge base that can help society engage religious diversity. The Jacobsens' articulate this hope well: "The future of the world depends on people of differing faiths developing the capacity to cooperate and work with each other, and American higher education can have a significant part in building that capacity."[5] □

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the authors' names on the subject line.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Laurie Goodstein, "Members of Jewish Student Group Test Permissible Discussion on Israel," *New York Times*, December 28, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/ 2013/12/29/us/members-of-jewish-student-group-test-permissible-discussion-on-israel.html; Michael Paulson, "Colleges and Evangelicals Collide on Bias Policy," *New York Times*, June 9, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/10/us/colleges-and-evangelicals-collide-on-bias-policy.html.

2. Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 30.

3. "What Is a 21st Century Liberal Education?," Association of American Colleges and Universities, accessed March 20, 2015, http://www.aacu.org/leap/what-is-a-liberal-education.

4. "High Impact Educational Practices," Association of American Colleges and Universities, accessed December 3, 2014, https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips.

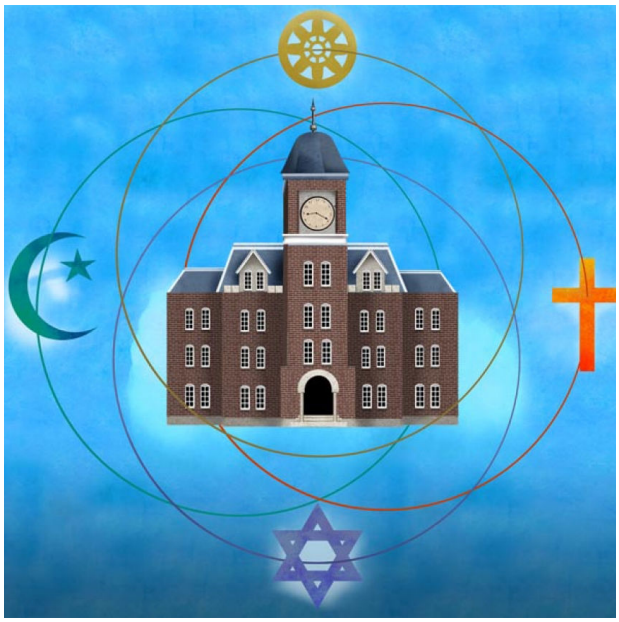
5. Jacobsen and Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible*, 91.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMENTARY

Colleges Should Be Nurturing Interfaith Leaders

By Eboo Patel | JUNE 13, 2016



Michael Morgenstern for The Chronicle

I recently met a graduate of an elite liberal-arts college who was working as the activities coordinator in a facility for senior citizens. The most interesting part of her job, she said, had to do with the diverse religious identities of her clients. She was constantly organizing event spaces for various religious holidays, working with the kitchen to make sure food was prepared in a manner that met different religious specifications, and arranging for funeral services according to the rites of diverse faith traditions. Occasionally she had to help calm an argument over doctrinal disagreements or contradictory religious practices.

"I had to learn most of this on the fly," she told me. "The one part of identity we never talked about in college was faith."

I was reminded of this story as I read through the recent *Chronicle* special report on diversity. As usual, the articles were sharp and provocative. And as usual, religious identity was totally ignored.

Any college that promises to prepare global citizens has to

This is not so much a critique of *The Chronicle* as it is an observation about higher-education discourse more generally. Colleges are generally quick to respond to one set of important identity issues (racialized

take religious diversity seriously enough to educate their students to be interfaith leaders.

policing, transgender accommodations, sexist pay disparities) with academic and co-curricular programs meant to prepare leaders who can engage such challenges. Unfortunately, other dimensions of diversity, namely religion, get short shrift.

But even a casual perusal of *The New York Times* on any given day illustrates that religious diversity issues — from diplomacy across religious divides to tailoring public-health campaigns to particular religious communities — are just as challenging as other identity issues. And the experience of the recent graduate I mentioned earlier who was working through religious issues at a senior citizens' center could as easily have taken place at a school, a company, a hospital, a YMCA, or, indeed, a college campus — in other words, the spaces where much of American life takes place, and where college graduates get jobs.

Given this reality, I'd like to make a small proposal: Any college that promises to prepare global citizens has to take religious diversity seriously enough to educate their students to be interfaith leaders.

An interfaith leader is someone with the vision, knowledge base, and skill set to create the spaces, organize the social processes, and craft the conversations such that people of different religions can share a common life together.

To begin with, interfaith leaders need a vision for a healthy religiously diverse democracy. They know that religion is about fundamental things; that diversity is not just about the differences you like but also the differences you don't like; that democracy is not just about the opportunity to vote but the ability to make your personal convictions public. In such a society, conflicts are to be expected. A healthy religiously diverse democracy is a place where people who disagree on some fundamental things do so without violence and in a manner that allows them to work together on other fundamental things.

To build such societies, interfaith leaders require particular knowledge. To start, they need an appreciative knowledge of various religious, ethical, and philosophical

communities. Appreciative knowledge goes beyond what is normally considered religious literacy (Which religion is the Bhagavad Gita associated with? What is the most populous Muslim-majority country?). It is a type of knowledge that attunes people to the contributions that various religious communities have made to the common good. It roughly parallels the approach that Black History Month or Women's History Month takes — correcting for knowledge gaps by telling stories about exemplary figures like George Washington Carver and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. An appreciative knowledge about Muslims, for example, would highlight figures from Rumi to Muhammad Ali to Malala Yousafzai and illustrate how they embody core values in Islam.

Interfaith leaders also need to know something of the history of interfaith cooperation. They should know the story of George Washington's "Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island"; of Jane Addams welcoming the immigrant Catholics and Jews who came to Hull House as equal citizens of a diverse democracy; of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. marching with the Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel for civil rights in Selma; of how evangelicals and Catholics went from being sworn enemies to political allies. Like appreciative knowledge, highlighting the history of interfaith cooperation serves as a corrective in a time when violent religious conflict is so broadly emphasized as to acquire the aura of inevitability.

In addition to a vision and a knowledge base, interfaith leaders need a specialized skill set. One essential skill is developing a radar screen for religious diversity. Over the past several decades, higher education has helped millions of students recognize troubling patterns when it comes to race, gender, and sexuality, such as the difficulties racial minorities face in Hollywood and the challenges women face in politics.

The same must be done for the implications of religious diversity. The absence of such a radar screen has led to some high-profile failures in significant domains. Madeleine Albright, for example, confesses in her book *The Mighty and the Almighty* that her State Department paid too little attention to the religious energies at the heart of the major conflicts of the 1990s, from the Balkans to South Asia to the Middle East. While she had legions of economic experts on her diplomatic staff, she had exactly one religion expert in the entire State Department. Had there been more, she concludes, wars might have ended sooner and lives could have been saved.

A second crucial interfaith leadership skill has to do with effective public narrative. As the psychologist Howard Gardner writes in *Leading Minds,* leaders relate compelling

stories in the world and embody those stories in their lives. At a time when so many stories about religious diversity emphasize ugliness, a huge part of interfaith leadership has to be about launching appreciative religious knowledge and the possibility of cooperation into the public sphere in a way that inspires hope.

Colleges have the unique privilege of connecting unparalleled intellectual resources with idealistic young people so that they might find meaningful vocations. Generations of young people have arrived on campus carrying ugly biases or large blind spots related to race, gender, and sexuality. The ideas and people they encountered during their time there set them on leadership paths that changed our society for the better.

In an era of frightening prejudice and violence related to religious diversity, colleges must do the same when it comes to nurturing interfaith leaders.

Eboo Patel is founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core and author of the forthcoming book Interfaith Leadership: A Primer (Beacon Press, August 2016).

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What Is Interfaith Leadership? by Eboo Patel

Introduction

What Is Interfaith Leadership?

Ruth Messinger, the former president of the American Jewish World Service, has a powerful story of interfaith leadership. She grew up in an observant Jewish home in New York City, attended Radcliffe College in the early 1960s, married, and started seeking a way for her (then) husband to avoid the Vietnam War. His best option was finding work as a doctor in a government facility. They tried getting a position in a major city on one of the coasts, but somehow wound up being assigned to a small town in Oklahoma. Ruth decided to make the most of an unfamiliar situation and enrolled in the master's program in social work at the University of Oklahoma.

After completing her degree in 1964, Ruth took a job as the director of child welfare programs for two counties in western Oklahoma. She quickly discovered that what passed for children's services in the area was an ugly collusion between the sheriff and Ms. Lucy, a woman who ran a ramshackle orphanage. Children and teenagers caught running away from home or committing minor crimes were thrown into jail and then sent to Ms. Lucy's orphanage. Ruth's first order of business was to inform the sheriff that putting a minor into jail was illegal. Moreover, Ms. Lucy's "facility" was totally unfit for children. If the minor's family was indeed unsuitable, the state had to provide an appropriate foster home for the child.

The sheriff's quick retort was that there were no foster homes in the area, and thus his was the only game in town. Then he lit into Ruth. She was clearly not from around here, she was a woman, and—to top it all off—she was Jewish. She could go take a hike.

Ruth knew that part of what the sheriff was saying was true; there were no foster homes in the area for the youth who needed them. Her job was not just to end the terrible current practice; it was to create a better alternative. She started going for walks around various neighborhoods in her town to get to know the area better, pushing a stroller with her newborn baby inside. She noticed that many of the private residences were marked with religious signs like "The Church of Jesus Christ Who Died for Our Sins."

Ruth knocked on doors and began conversations with the people who answered. She introduced herself and explained that her job was to help vulnerable children in western Oklahoma. She detailed the challenges facing troubled youth in the area and expressed that her highest hope was to help those kids find loving homes. Based on the religious sign she had seen outside the house, it looked like the residence doubled as a place for worship and community gathering. Might they help?

The most common response went something like this: "Come back on Wednesday morning for our praise service and speak to the group." There seemed to be some kind of religious gathering taking place at one house-church or another just about every day of

the week and just about every hour of the day. Ruth sat through countless sermons, praise songs, and altar calls. As promised, the preacher would give her a chance to speak. Ruth would rise and tell stories of local children and teenagers in need. When she was done, the preacher would quote scripture and say to the gathered worshippers, "Who here will answer the call of God and serve as loving families for these young people?"

"People would literally line up to help," Ruth said. "It was amazing to witness. Those evangelical house-churches built the child welfare network in western Oklahoma."

I found one particular story that Ruth told especially moving. Every few weeks or so, Ruth would get a call from the sheriff in the middle of the night. As the number of foster families in the area grew, he had grudgingly stopped his practice of throwing troubled youth in jail and carting them off to Ms. Lucy's facility. Instead, when he caught a runaway in the middle of the night, he phoned Ruth. "If you can't find a home for this kid within the hour, she's going to jail," he would say in his gruff voice. Without getting out of bed, Ruth would phone her friend Stacy, a devout evangelical who had told Ruth that she felt called by God to do whatever she could to help youth in need. Ruth would explain the situation, and Stacy would say, "Have the sheriff drop the girl off at my house." Ruth relayed the message to the sheriff. Stacy would meet the child at the door with a cup of hot cocoa, make her feel comfortable, and give her a bed for the night. Ruth would show up the next morning to work out a long-term solution.

Even as things got better, they were far from easy. Part of this had to do with Ruth's being Jewish in a time and place rife with anti-Semitism. Ruth recalls riding in a car with a group of older women when one of them said that she was off to do her shopping and aimed to "Jew down" the prices. She also remembers the day her colleagues at work found out that she was Jewish. She was met with surprised looks and a comment from her boss: "Well, you don't look Jewish." Many of the things that she heard in local churches contradicted her faith; some even offended her. One time, she was invited to a Sunday morning service at one of the fancier churches in town. It turned out to be Palm Sunday, and the pastor gave a fiery sermon on the killing of Jesus— by Jews.

Ruth was deeply offended and resolved to use the moment as an opportunity for education. She invited the pastor over to her homefor tea and what we would now call an interfaith conversation. Ruth shared that not only was the pastor factually wrong about his claim that Jews killed Jesus, but that she was Jewish and felt hurt and insulted by his sermon. Moreover, America was growing increasingly religiously diverse. Sermons like the one he just gave were sure to cause division. And then Ruth pointed out a powerful area of commonality between her faith and his: Jesus was Jewish. Instead of preaching insulting and divisive falsehoods, why not focus on how the actions of Jesus inspired both Jews and Christians to serve others?

Just as Ruth helped the Christians she worked with understand Judaism, so she developed a deeper appreciation for evangelical Christianity during her time in western Oklahoma. She was especially struck by the ethic of service in the community: "They preached that God meant for us to serve others, and they practiced what they preached. When the pastor asked for volunteers and quoted scripture, people lined up to help." The 1960s were a tumultuous time—the women's movement, the counterculture, the protests against the Vietnam War. Ruth Messinger and those evangelicals in western Oklahoma lined up on different sides of most of those major issues. Ruth was a graduate school–educated liberal Jewish feminist from New York who found herself in Oklahoma because her husband was fleeing the Vietnam War. The evangelicals she was working with helped make Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee," with its lyrics celebrating a

traditional understanding of American patriotism (against draft-dodging; for waving the flag on Main Street), one of the most popular songs of the era. Suffi ce it to say there were signifi cant differences between Ruth and the majority of her evangelical partners on most of the issues of the time.

Yet Ruth identified a powerful point of intersection between their evangelical Christian values and her Jewish values. At the heart of that intersection was the welfare of young people from troubled family situations in western Oklahoma. There are hundreds in western Oklahoma who lived in loving homes rather than a derelict orphanage because of Ruth.

Ruth's story exemplifies the kind of interfaith leadership I focus on in this book. Interfaith leaders are people who have the ability to lead individuals and communities that orient around religion differently toward understanding and cooperation. This book makes a case for why this work is important and provides a guide for how to do it effectively. To that end, it is useful to say a few more words about how Ruth's story illustrates this kind of interfaith leadership.

Ruth sought connection rather than division. When she saw Christian signs outside of people's homes, her instinct was not "I disagree with that understanding of Jesus, therefore I am staying away from that house." Instead, she thought to herself, "That is clearly a place where a leader lives and people gather. I will certainly have differences and disagreements with them, but we will also likely have some deeply held values in common. I will work to fi nd those shared values and highlight them in a way that inspires all of us to create a foster-care network for youth."

It is one thing to seek connection; it is another thing to have the skills to successfully connect. Ruth found ways to speak to and mobilize a different religious community for a common cause. She learned to build trust with the pastor. She learned to earn goodwill by paying personal visits to house-churches and spending time with the people who gathered there. She even learned that being a new mother with a little baby provided an initial point of positive contact.

Ruth had significant disagreements with her evangelical partners. She did not agree with them about their doctrine of Jesus as Lord and Savior, or their support for the Vietnam War, or their dim view of feminism. Ruth did not attempt to erase those disagreements, nor did she let the disagreements prevent her from partnering with them on finding foster homes. When the disagreement crossed the line into insult, she addressed the situation head-on, as with the Palm Sunday sermon on Jews killing Jesus. Crucially, she used the situation as an opportunity to educate her interlocutor, not simply scold him. Her method of education was to highlight something shared between their different traditions, namely, that Jesus was Jewish.

Even as Ruth was educating those around her about Judaism, her own knowledge about and appreciation for evangelical Christians grew. She admired their strong sense of community and their deep belief in God and, most of all, that they preached the importance of service and practiced what they preached.

Civic Interfaith Leadership

Ruth's story illustrates the central focus of this book, what I am calling "civic interfaith leadership in a religiously diverse democracy." The term "interfaith leader" typically conjures up images of old men dressed in offi cial regalia, invested with formal religious

authority, debating doctrine in fancy cathedrals. Ruth was not a theologian, a pastor, or an elderly man. She was a young, female social worker who had the ability to engage house-churches and government agencies, pastors and sheriffs, religious doctrine and federal laws, to benefi t the lives of a vulnerable youth population. The where, who, and what of civic interfaith leadership certainly includes churches, clergy, and doctrine, but that is a relatively narrow slice of the broader landscape that I intend the word "civic" to convey.

When I use the term "civic interfaith landscape," I mean the various spaces (schools, parks, college campuses, companies, organizations, libraries, sports leagues, hospitals) where people who orient around religion differently interact with one another with varying degrees of ignorance and understanding, tension and connection, division and cooperation, when their faith identities are implicated by that interaction. When I say "civic interfaith work," I mean the kinds of activities and conversations that, through addressing diverse faith identities in interaction, strengthen a religiously diverse democracy. An interfaith leader is someone expert in organizing these.

Sometimes an interfaith leader has to respond to interfaith dynamics that emerge somewhat surprisingly in a civic space. Take, for example, the funeral arrangements that followed the tragic killing of Officer Wenjian Liu, believed to be the first Chinese American in the New York Police Department to be killed in the line of duty.[1] NYPD officials are accustomed to organizing Roman Catholic funerals involving thousands of uniformed officers and solemn eulogies by dignitaries. Officer Liu was part of a Buddhist tradition that commemorates death very differently. An auspicious day must be chosen for the event, rather than simply a day that is convenient for the public officials who wish to speak. There is generally no eulogy celebrating the life of the departed. In fact, a Chinese Buddhist funeral is typically not a public affair at all. Relatives and close friends gather in a private setting with Buddhist monks and wail, sob, and fall to the ground throughout the somber prayer ceremony. They burn objects signifying affluence in front of a picture of the deceased so that he may be comfortable in the afterlife. This approach, favored by the family, made little room for the many police officers who understandably wanted to pay tribute to their fallen brother in a manner ritually meaningful for them. Whoever it was at the NYPD who actually organized the funeral must have had some interfaith leadership skills.

Other times, an interfaith leader will seek to enrich a civic space by proactively mobilizing interfaith networks. If you are an active citizen and a community volunteer in an American suburb and the mayor asks you to pull together a thousand people for a major blood drive, you will no doubt want to tap into the social capital of local faith communities. And once you've got them together at an event they feel is an expression of their various faith commitments to serve others, you might want to use the opportunity to organize an interfaith discussion and have them share stories about how their faith inspires them to help others. You will need to figure out how to be inclusive of Jehovah's Witnesses and other faith communities who are religiously opposed to blood transfusions. Such a scenario highlights one of the great challenges of interfaith leadership—how to navigate the many areas in which people who orient around religion differently disagree.

Religiously Diverse Democracy

The different ways that people express religious and secular identities are especially important in a democracy, where people are free to bring their personal convictions into

public life. In a democracy, people have the power of speech, association, and election. You can build institutions that gather people of like beliefs and, through these, amplify your voice. You can make that voice heard in politics by voting for particular candidates or running for offi ce yourself. In this way, you can influence budgets and write laws. And if you come across a law that you feel infringes on your religious identity, you can file a case in court.

American democracy affords a special place to religious identity. It is not for nothing that the British writer G. K. Chesterton said that "America is a nation with the soul of a church."[2] The Puritans who arrived in Massachusetts Bay in the seventeenth century came seeking religious freedom. The founders had much to say about this freedom, including what they wrote in the First Amendment. Subsequent generations have strengthened this notion of special privilege for religion, most notably in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 and the Supreme Court's decision in the Hobby Lobby case.[3] Moreover, American society is far more religious in just about every respect than other industrialized nations.

Given all this, it should come as no surprise that the place of religion in a diverse democracy has been a central topic of discussion among political philosophers. Some, like John Rawls, saw the thriving of religious diversity in democratic cultures as a significant challenge. His term for religion was "comprehensive doctrine."[4] He was concerned that a religious person has a comprehensive doctrine very different from the comprehensive doctrine that Rawls believes ought to underpin a liberal democracy. How can we be sure that said religious person will give his allegiance to the underlying arrangements of a liberal democracy, for example, to the president rather than the pope? How are we to know that if a particular religious group gains power, it will not attempt to force its religiously based positions through the mechanisms of government, thus imposing its comprehensive doctrine on others?

Religious diversity complicates matters further because it means there are multiple comprehensive doctrines in a single society. How can we be sure that people from those diverse communities will be intelligible to one another? After all, they do not share the same views with regard to creation, salvation, religious authority, and so on. For Rawls, the problem of potential tribalism only compounded the initial problem of misplaced loyalty. Religious diversity in a democracy may well give rise to conflict between religious groups that collectively have no regard for the authority of the government or the legitimacy of its basic political arrangements.

Rawls's famous solution to the problem is to suggest religious discourse be limited to the private sphere and kept out of political discourse.[5] Citizens, especially those acting in political roles, are free to practice their faith at home, but they ought not bring it into the public square. They should not, for example, offer religious reasons for their political positions. Their views on civil rights, antipoverty efforts, abortion, foreign aid, and so on should be expressed in the terms of what Rawls calls "public reason," which is rooted in the social contract of a liberal democracy and is by definition devoid of religious language. Rawls allows for religious reasons only if they are quickly followed by justifications consistent with his notion of public reason.

Not surprisingly, religious philosophers have taken issue with this position. Nicholas Wolterstorff, for example, writes:

> It belongs to the religious convictions of a good many religious people in our

> society that they ought to base their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice on their religious convictions. They do not view as an option whether or not to do so. It is their conviction that they ought to strive for wholeness, integrity, integration, in their lives: that they ought to allow the Word of God, the teachings of the Torah, the command and example of Jesus, or whatever, to shape their existence as a whole, including, then, their social and political existence. Their religion is not, for them, about something other than their social and political existence; it is also about their social and political existence. Accordingly, to require of them that they not base their decisions and discussions concerning political issues on their religion is to infringe, inequitably, on the free exercise of religion.[6]

Wolterstorff is making a basic point not just about religion, but also about democracy. Citizens of a democracy are free to base their views on whatever they want and express them (within broad limits) however they wish. If this gives rise to tension between those groups or calls for political change, that is part of the process of democracy. Moreover, American democracy has benefi ted greatly from precisely this dynamic. Consider how both the abolitionist and civil rights movements involved a public religiosity that caused tension with other groups and sought fundamental political change.

Still, Wolterstorff gives short shrift to Rawlsian concerns about what Justice Felix Frankfurter called "cohesive sentiment."[7] Isn't it possible that encouraging people with very different religious convictions to express those identities in public might lead to protracted violent conflict, or at least a society where people are living in separate and mutually unintelligible religious universes?

The Princeton philosopher Jeffrey Stout offers a solution. Stout agrees with Wolterstorrf that people have a right to express themselves, but he takes seriously Rawls's concern with the cohesive whole and the arrangements that underlie it. Yes, people ought to express themselves, but they should express themselves with the hope of being intelligible and convincing to one another, and they should direct signifi cant energy to the health of the whole. Such practices strengthen what Stout calls the "civic nation."[8]

Stout sees this civic nation as sacred, defined as the American people rather than the American government. He believes that the ties that bind a cacophonous country of 320 million into a civic nation with a collective destiny are energetic civic activities, activities he refers to as "thick democratic practices." Only by playing soccer and baseball, forming block clubs and PTAs, and most importantly, by listening and talking to one another with candor and sympathy, can we have any hope of building understanding and cooperation across diverse identities. Above all, a democratic people, a civic nation, is a community of citizens who can offer intelligible reasons to one another for their political views and public positions. Stout writes: "[Democracy] takes for granted that reasonable people will differ in their conceptions of piety, in their grounds for hope, in their ultimate concerns, and in their speculations about salvation. Yet it holds that people who differ on such matters can still exchange reasons with one another intelligibly, cooperate in crafting political arrangements that promote justice and decency in their relations with one another, and do both of these things without compromising their integrity."[9]

Religion is about fundamental things. Diversity is about people with different identities and deep disagreements interacting with great frequency and intensity. Democracy is

about the freedom to advance your deepest personal convictions in public life. In a religiously diverse democracy, especially one that accords a special place to faith, deep disagreements on fundamental matters are to be expected. A healthy religiously diverse democracy is a society where people who disagree on some fundamental things do so without violence and in a manner where they are still able to work together on other fundamental things.

An interfaith leader is someone who can create the spaces, organize the social processes, and craft the conversations such that people who orient around religion differently can have a common life together.

Why Leadership?

In a classic article for Harvard Business Review titled "What Leaders Really Do," John Kotter writes, "Change is the function of leadership."[10] But in the Internet era, why do we need leaders to effect change? Doesn't change happen at the click of a button or the move of a mouse or the speed of a tweet? Actually, recent research shows that the most important driver of certain types of change is an effective leader. A story told by Atul Gawande in the New Yorker illustrates.[11]

In the late 1960s, medical researchers discovered a simple solution for combating diarrheal diseases like cholera: drink ten to twenty liters a day of a fluid with a particular mixture of sugar and salt. A few years later, this solution was found to dramatically reduce deaths related to cholera during an outbreak in Bangladesh. Some public health officials assumed that the next steps were easy—simply publicize the beneficial effects of the mixture and advertise them in a public education campaign. The recipe was simple, the materials were readily available, and the stakes could not be higher.

For all its easy logic, the public education campaign failed. Turns out there was no great demand for a simple, lifesaving cholera solution, even after publicizing how well it worked. Death rates due to diarrheal disease remained stubbornly high in Bangladesh.

A decade later, a Bangladeshi organization called BRAC attempted an alternative approach. BRAC hired teams of people, trained them to teach those caught in the grip of cholera how to make and use the lifesaving solution, and then sent them out to affected villages across Bangladesh. In the course of their work, the teams learned the art of convincing desperate mothers that the best thing to do for a wailing baby emitting streams of fluid from both ends of his body was to keep giving him this nasty-tasting solution. The teams went through four thousand villages, taught the process to twelve million families, and saved a stunning number of lives.

In a digital age, it is tempting to think that technical fixes are all that are needed to spur social change, especially in situations where the problem is dire and the solution is fairly straightforward. But, as the Bangladesh cholera story illustrates, there's frequently an old-school dynamic to social change. It's not a cool website or a sexy public relations campaign that ultimately bends the arc; it's a person. As Gawande puts it: "In the era of the iPhone, Facebook and Twitter, we've become enamored of ideas that spread as effortlessly as ether. We want frictionless, 'turnkey' solutions to the major difficulties of the world—hunger, disease, poverty. We prefer instructional videos to teachers, drones to troops, incentives to institutions. People and institutions can feel messy and anachronistic."[12]

Gawande reminds us that there are actually many areas where real people are the key

drivers of social change. We rely on teachers in our schools to teach our kids. The US government has sent out hundreds of thousands of agricultural extension agents to help farmers learn the most effective methods for improving crop yields. Theoretically, those things could have been left to ad campaigns, books, and websites. But the fact is, in many areas, people learn best from other people.

Social change is essentially a process of getting people to do things differently, something scholars call "creating new norms." As Everett Rogers, the social change guru and author of the highly influential book, *Diffusion of Innovations*, writes, "Diffusion is essentially a social process through which people talking to people spread an innovation."[13]

Gawande, building on Rogers's statement, concludes, "People follow the lead of other people they know and trust when they decide whether to take up [something new]. Every change requires effort, and the decision to make that effort is a social process."[14] People change when they are taught by other people whom they find relatable and inspiring. The people who do the teaching, the relating, and the inspiring we call leaders. Interfaith leaders are people who cause other people to change their attitudes and actions with respect to religious diversity.

Locating Myself

The personal identities and commitments each of us brings to interfaith leadership will most certainly color our work. That is as it should be. An interfaith leader need not check her identity at the door, but does need to be aware of how her various views and positions might affect her engagement in any particular situation.

Let me take myself as an example. As I was writing the story about Ruth Messinger, I realized that I couldn't name a single evangelical pastor who runs a house-church in Oklahoma, but I have dozens of friends like Ruth. My own position as a Chicago-based, broadly progressive, Oxford-educated Ismaili Muslim who leads a nonprofit organization puts me in circles where I am far more likely to be in relationship with highly educated, city-dwelling, liberal Jews who run civil society organizations than with evangelical pastors leading house-churches in western Oklahoma. I know how Ruth tells the story of working with those evangelicals to build a foster-care network, but I don't know how those evangelicals tell it.

My identity shapes my world and my worldview—my network of relationships, the stories I am likely to hear, and the manner in which I am likely to filter them. Therefore, it most certainly shapes this book. One obvious way is the examples I use. Most of the illustrations in this book come from the religious traditions with which I am familiar, the world of higher education (based both on my experience speaking at over one hundred campuses and on my familiarity with the writings of certain scholars) and my regular diet of reading (the *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*). The frameworks I present here emerge out of these experiences. My hope is that you are able to place your own experience within the categories I articulate. In other words, when I illustrate the theology of interfaith cooperation with Muslim stories, I hope that you are able to place your own stories coming from your own Catholic or Hindu or humanist identity within the framework that I present. If you fi nd that your world and worldview lead you to articulate substantially different frameworks on any of the questions that I address here, I hope you write your own book. That is precisely how the process of defining the fi eld of research, teaching, and practice that is interfaith leadership will progress.

About This Book

As a primer, the book is meant to be a relatively clear and quick read. It is intended for faculty who teach classes that deal with religious diversity, and students open to a meaningful twenty-first-century vocation; for participants in the growing number of interfaith groups across the nation and the world; for citizens of small towns, suburbs, and cities who are watching their patch of earth grow ever more diverse and are committed to making the most of an opportunity both civic and sacred; and for members of faith or philosophical communities with an increasingly wide array of friends and family members who orient around religion differently and who want to both articulate their perspective on ultimate concerns and have good relationships with those who have other views.

This book has seven chapters, corresponding to the six categories that I think are essential for interfaith leadership: identity, theory (this category has two chapters), vision, knowledge base, skill set, and intangible qualities.

- Chapter 1, "The Identity of an Interfaith Leader," explores how people can mine personal experience to create a narrative identity as an interfaith leader.
- Chapters 2 and 3 are about the theory of interfaith. I break the term "interfaith" into its component parts, "inter" and "faith." "Inter" is defined as the relationships between people who orient around religion differently. "Faith" is defi ned as the relationship between an individual and what we commonly understand as a religious or philosophical tradition (such as Christianity, Hinduism, or humanism). The term "interfaith," therefore, has two profound implications: how do our relationships with those who are different affect our relationships with our religious or philosophical traditions, and how do relationships with our traditions affect how we interact with people who are different from us?
- Chapter 4, "The Vision of Interfaith Leadership," presents frameworks that flesh out what interfaith leaders hope their efforts will achieve.
- Chapter 5 is on the knowledge base required for interfaith leadership.
- Chapter 6 enumerates the skill set needed to be an effective interfaith leader.
- Chapter 7 highlights the intangible qualities that separate truly exceptional interfaith leaders from merely good ones.
- The conclusion summarizes the main themes of the book in the context of a concrete example.

Interfaith work is often referred to as "bridge building." My favorite bridge is a literary one, from Italo Calvino's beautiful book Invisible Cities. In one chapter, the traveler Marco Polo describes to the emperor Kublai Khan a particular bridge in his kingdom. The emperor grows impatient and asks Polo to get to the point. He wants to know about the stone that holds the bridge together.

> The bridge is not held together by a stone, says Polo, it is held together by an arch.
> So tell me about the arch, says the Emperor.
> Without stones, retorts the traveler, there is no arch.[15]

Polo's bridge is the guiding metaphor for this book. As you read through, I hope you come to view yourself as a bridge builder (identity), develop an understanding of the complex landscape you are building on (theory), get a clear image of the destination you are building toward (vision), acquire the stones that are the main materials of the bridge (knowledge base), build the aptitude to connect the stones into an arch strong enough to

hold a diverse community (skill set), and cultivate the intangibles that give people enough confidence in your leadership to risk the journey (qualities).

1. 1.

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Liberal Education 103:1 (Winter 2017), pp. 28-35

On Building a Diverse Democracy: Justice and Identity in the Twenty-First Century

By: Eboo Patel

In the spring of 2008, on a beautiful college campus outside of Pittsburgh, I found myself giving a keynote address alongside a man named Nechirvan Barzani. He was introduced to me by campus officials as an important Iraqi leader. By that time, the war in Iraq was over five years old and getting more unpopular by the day. I knew almost no one who supported it.

The fact that Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction were a Bush administration fiction was just one of several reasons why. Another, perhaps more important, justification for being against the war was based on identity. As an American Muslim, I knew that the lives of many of my coreligionists would be ruined. Opposing the war was an act of solidarity with my people. Most other American Muslims shared this logic, and most multicultural progressives, seeking to be good allies, did as well.

Being in the presence of Barzani gave me the opportunity to express a deeply held view to a member of a group who was directly affected by my government's destructive actions. I shook his hand, gave him my *salaam*, looked him in the eye and said, "I'm so sorry for what my government has done to your country."

He stared back as if he didn't understand. I thought that perhaps his English was a little shaky, so I repeated, "Mr. Barzani, I am sorry for what my government has done by starting a war in your country that has destroyed so many lives. I want to tell you that so many Americans—Muslims and those in solidarity with Muslims—opposed this war."

Again Barzani looked confused, but this time I realized that the source of his confusion was not an inability to comprehend my words. He was perplexed because he understood me only too well. I watched his face turn from bewilderment to frustration and then flash to anger. He composed himself for long enough to spit out, "The only thing you should be sorry for is that your government did not get rid of Saddam fifteen years earlier, when he was using chemical gas on my people. I am a Kurd, and that monster tried to destroy us many times over. Now that he is gone, we are finally free." And then he turned and walked away.

I'd had easily hundreds of conversations with fellow multicultural progressives about the Iraq war. The destructive impact of the invasion on Muslims was taken prima facie as a reason to oppose it. "Muslims" was always invoked as a single monolithic category, frequently preceded by the term "oppressed," and almost never described or delineated any further. In our minds, there were just two groups—the oppressor American government and the oppressed Muslims of Iraq. There was really only one side to be on.

Preferred identities

Being a multicultural progressive means paying attention to identity, and caring about justice, and seeing the relationship between the two. There is a resurgence of such conversations on college campuses these days, mostly to the good in my view. My encounter with Barzani forced me to reckon with the fact that my worldview was not quite as broad-minded as I'd liked to think. For as much time as my circles spent talking about the Palestinians, we almost never mentioned another stateless Muslim people, the Kurds. Having never really considered the experience or perspective of this identity, I had never conceived that they might have a different definition of justice when it came to the Iraq war.

The experience has made me wonder about which identities receive the most attention on college campuses, and what the implications of these dispositions might be. To that end, I was struck by a recent front-page story in the *New York Times* on campus diversity training.[1] Race, ethnicity, and gender were the focus of the workshops. There were references to safe spaces and trigger warnings, an implication that campuses employ such structures and devices to both heighten awareness of these identities and protect them from a range of aggressions. Such matters are quite familiar to me. They are the dimensions of identity that occupy my consciousness and the minds of most other people I know. They are without a doubt the "preferred identities" on selective college campuses.

In the same day's *New York Times* was a column by Frank Bruni about an element of identity that wasn't mentioned at all in the front-page article on campus diversity training: being a military veteran.[2] It turns out that at many elite colleges, you can count the number of veterans on one hand, and in most cases, it won't even take all your fingers.

Something occurred to me. In all the multicultural progressive circles I've been in where people have been invited to identify themselves, I've probably heard hundreds of people say some version of, "my name is Erin, and I identity as

a lesbian" or "my name is Carlos, and I identify as a Latino." There is only one time I ever recall anyone identifying as a military veteran.

Is that because being a veteran is an insignificant identity? Because it does not shape one's life or outlook or how one is likely to experience college? Or is it because my circles are, in their own way, quite narrow?

In his column, Frank Bruni pointed out that campuses recruit people (students, staff, faculty, and administrators) who are part of some identity groups in order to enrich campus life. Clearly, for elite campuses, veterans are not on this list. I started to think through the other implications of elite campuses preferring race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, while virtually ignoring military veterans. In addition to being the focus of recruitment and diversity training, there are courses on elite campuses that focus on some identities, centers where people from those identities can gather, paid staff with whom they can discuss their experiences. I wonder, for the few veterans at elite colleges, what courses they might take to explore their identity, what center they might go to where their community gathers, which staff or faculty members proudly wear their own military experience such that students who share that identity might approach them for an independent study or just an empathetic conversation over coffee.

College campuses that employ safe spaces and trigger warnings typically do so for preferred identities. The rationale is that racial minorities, women, and members of the LGBTQ community have experienced marginalization, oppression, and trauma in the larger society, and ought to be proactively protected in the intense environment that is the college campus, even if it means restricting the freedoms of others. A safe space for black students to talk about policing may, for example, bar white students.

What might happen if such protections extended beyond the preferred identities of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality to, for example, veterans? Consider this story. A friend of mine is a professor of religious studies at a highly diverse Texas university. While teaching his standard world religions course, he opened his unit on Islam by playing a recitation of the Qur'an. He noticed one of his students shift uncomfortably in his seat, get visibly distressed to the point of looking sick, and finally pack his bag and leave. This student came to see him during office hours and explained that he was a veteran and had recently done a tour of duty in Iraq. Several friends of his had been killed there, and he had been wounded himself. Anytime he listened to something as distinctive as Qur'an recitation, he had flashbacks to his friends being killed by IEDs to chants of *Allahu Akbar*. He asked the professor—my friend—why he wasn't warned that Islam would be presented in such a vivid manner. He requested that he be excused from the entire unit, saying he could get a doctor's note that confirmed that material about Islam triggered his PTSD.

Should military veterans as an identity group get warnings in courses—religion, history, literature—where Islam is on the syllabus because it might trigger their medically diagnosed PTSD? Ought there to be safe spaces set up for veterans when a Muslim speaker—say, me—comes to campus?

Expanding my worldview

College is where I developed my own multicultural progressive politics. I grew up in the western suburbs of Chicago during the 1980s and 1990s, and my highest aspiration was to be white. Of course, I didn't realize this until I got to college in 1993, a time of identity consciousness that reminds me of our current moment.

I remember going to see the film version of Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* with a group of guys from my residence hall during my first year in college. I walked out with tears in my eyes because the film reminded me so much of my own childhood growing up in an Asian-American household. They walked out asking about the nearest Taco Bell. I let them get their fake burritos and went to the library to look up books about minorities in America. In high school, I would have buried my ethnic identity; in college, I got to explore it.

Just about all the courses I took had some kind of focus on minority identity experiences. It was in college that I first considered the long-term effects of slavery and segregation, that I first recognized that there was such a thing as "the African American experience," and that I became aware of the racism in our criminal justice system. I was surprised to learn that crack cocaine had significantly higher criminal penalties than the powder form. "Why's that?" I wondered aloud in a sociology class. A black student a few rows away looked at me and said, incredulously, "Do you not know?"

It was in college where I made my first gay friends and went with them to see Angels in America three times. I was profoundly affected by their stories of coming out, of people they knew who were HIV positive, and those they knew who had died in the slaughter years of the 1980s. I came to share their deep frustration that it took a straight white boy named Ryan White to contract HIV and die of AIDS for the American public to start paying sympathetic attention.

I had a friend who was part of the Society of Women in Engineering. I scoffed when she left dinner early one night to attend a meeting of the group. "Do you know how male-dominated engineering is?" she scolded me. "You don't think the Barbie doll that said 'math is hard' has anything to do with that?"

I started to see how much of my life and my world had been defined by race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. It was like the scales falling from my eyes. Some people, by dint of their privileged identity in the aforementioned categories, were oppressors. Others were oppressed. I applied this Manichean lens to just about everything.

I went off to England to do a PhD. I knew I wanted to do an ethnography of young people that had something to do with identity. I fell in with a group of young South Asian Londoners and started doing participant observation in their world and engaging them in semi-structured interviews. Naturally, I asked them how their ethnicity affected their lives. It had affected mine so profoundly, something I had realized when I was about their age. They didn't really know what to do with my questions. I told stories of my own growing up and wondered aloud if they related to the overt racism and microaggressions I'd experienced as an adolescent. They didn't. I theorized that they had simply internalized their racism so deeply that they had neither the framework nor the language with which to describe it. I read British postcolonial theory and came up with ingenious ways to interject race and ethnicity into conversations and interviews. Still no spark.

"Maybe they just don't think of themselves primarily through the lens of racism?" my advisor mused after I showed him my field notes and the transcripts of the interviews. "A white guy would say that," I thought to myself. I kept trying to dig regarding racism, and my research subjects kept shrugging their shoulders as I asked my questions. At some point, I had to wonder to myself: Why do I keep insisting that they feel and see things that they don't seem to be feeling or seeing? Do I want them to be victims of racism? Was I guilty of telling these people what their experience was, or worse, what it ought to have been?

For their part, what they kept telling me was that the most important part of their identity was being Ismaili Muslims. "Aha," I thought to myself, "I don't know much about religion, but I know what paradigm to put that in. As Muslims, you must feel oppressed by Christians." And so the whole cycle started again. I'd do semi-structured interviews trying to get them to talk about how oppressed they felt by Christians and, well, let's just say my advisor had to make a similar comment to me about six months later.

It turns out that my Ismaili Muslim subjects did feel uncomfortable vis-à-vis another group in Britain—other Muslims! This did not fit at all comfortably into my multicultural progressive worldview, especially when I learned that many of those other Muslims occupied a lower social class than the well-heeled Ismailis. Which group was the oppressor, and which was the oppressed?

And so I faced an interesting conundrum. Would I expand my worldview in a manner that absorbed what I was learning about the world, or would I try to squeeze the world into my worldview?

Which lesson would I choose to draw from my college experience? That I had now discovered the identities that matter and would go through the rest of my life looking at the world through that paradigm? Or that I discovered identities and experiences that were previously unknown to me—identities I hadn't paid much attention to, experiences I haven't had—and that there are likely to be more of those as I continue with life? College had been a wonderful expansion of a narrow worldview. What other expansions might be in store?

Liberal education

Martha Nussbaum makes a powerful observation that is highly relevant to our current moment: "All modern democracies are prone to hasty and sloppy thinking and to the substitution of invective for argument."[3] A rigorous liberal education that emphasizes critical thinking about one's own paradigm and a sympathetic understanding of other identities serves as a kind of public health plan for societies like ours. It is particularly troubling, therefore, to see social justice conversations tend toward denouncement over engagement in the very places—college campuses—charged with advancing liberal education.

Extrapolating from Nussbaum's thesis that liberal education is about "the creation of a critical public culture, through an emphasis on analytical thinking, argumentation and active participation in debate," [4] I believe a liberally educated person should recognize that, in a world of different identities, there are likely to be different definitions of justice, especially when it becomes clear that different people who have similar identities interpret those differently. Diversity is not just about the differences you like. It's also about the differences you don't like, the disagreements. Any time you are in a room where everyone agrees with your definition of justice, it is probably not a diverse room.

A liberally educated person should also recognize that the reasonable expression of one identity can be an affront to another. The desire of a Kurd to remove Saddam Hussein is an injury to the hope of a Sunni Ba'athist to keep him. When a Christian says that Jesus is the Son of God, it affronts a Muslim's belief that Jesus is the Messenger of God, but not his son. When Muslims eat beef, it affronts a Hindu's belief that cows are sacred and should not be slaughtered for food.

And a liberally educated person should recognize that it is not always easy to determine which identity matters more, or which side to be on. Oppression is a slippery standard, and an overused and overheated one. Also, even when who qualifies as oppressed is clear, the next steps are fraught. Kurds are oppressed in Iraq. Does that mean you or I

should have been in favor of the war?

One mark of being an educated person is recognizing that the world is unlikely to fit inside your worldview. Part of what I believe a college education is about is proactively looking for the hard examples, the cases that do not fit inside your worldview, precisely to expand it. This is a variation on Karl Popper's falsification theory. Put simply, do not look for the illustrations that confirm your paradigm. Instead, be on the lookout for the examples that challenge and, therefore, might expand it.

There is value in the multicultural progressive paradigm, and there are limits. My favorite story about the current limits is contained in James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*—a mid-twentieth-century book that has been rediscovered in recent times, referenced heavily in works by Ta Nehisi Coates and Jesmyn Ward. It rocked my world when I first read it in my early twenties. I loved its pull-no-punches description of the effects of white racism on black lives: "This is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it."[5]

But in my rereading, a different storyline emerged for me. Baldwin, largely out of his disgust regarding white racism, accepts an invitation to Elijah Muhammad's dinner table. He finds himself profoundly uncomfortable there. He finds the talk of total racial separation to be borderline insanity. The comment about the evils of drinking the white devil's poison makes him shift in his seat, considering that he is heading to the north side after the dinner for a drink with a white friend.

At the end of the day, Baldwin understands Elijah Muhammad's anger, but he doesn't want to live in his world. It causes him to reframe some of his own thoughts about his role in the United States and his dreams for his country.

He ends the book with two observations that I keep close to me as I participate in the American experiment:

I am not a ward of America; I am one of the first Americans to arrive on these shores.[6]

If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and change the history of the world.[7]

Notes

1. Stephanie Saul, "Campus 101: Learning How Not to Offend," *New York Times*, September 7, 2016, A1.

2. Frank Bruni, "Elites Neglect Veterans," New York Times, September 7, 2016, A23.

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5. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1963; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1993), 5. Citations refer to the Vintage edition.

6. Ibid., 98.

7. Ibid., 105.

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the author's name on the subject line.

Eboo Patel is founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core. This article is adapted from the convocation address delivered by the author at Oberlin College in October 2016.

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A Nation Under Two Flags: Liberal Education, Interfaith Literacy, and the New American Holy War

By: Eboo Patel

On January 27, 2017, I saw America in split screen. That evening, I arrived at Atlanta's Hartsfield Jackson airport and saw people with signs that said, "Muslims Welcome." I turned on my iPhone to learn that while I had been in the air, the Trump administration had announced a wide-ranging ban on Muslims entering the United States. I was witnessing the first demonstrations against that act.

I went from the airport to a gathering of college student leaders, where I delivered my prepared talk on the inspiring power of past American movements for interfaith civic cooperation. I made little reference to the recently announced Muslim ban, or to the Trump administration more widely.

Many of the students of color in the audience were not having it. They spoke passionately about how violated they felt watching a man who had campaigned on bigotry get elected to the Oval Office and immediately appoint proud white supremacists to senior roles in his administration. Now those people were enshrining their discriminatory views into American policy. Why was I offering the weak tea of interfaith civic cooperation when I should have been rallying a movement of young people to storm the barracks?

As I listened to the students in Atlanta advocate for their view of interfaith social justice (one that I resonated with deeply), I flashed back to the place where I had begun the day. It was at a hotel in Washington, DC, where I had given a talk to the presidents of the Consortium of Christian Colleges and Universities. Over breakfast that morning, I had seen groups of high school and college students gather excitedly around pancakes and omelets, some with Bibles in hand. They wore T-shirts advertising their various faith communities—Mormon, Evangelical, and Catholic. All of them, so far as I could tell, were white. Finally, my curiosity got the better of me, and I approached one of the tables to ask what was going on.

"We're here for the most important March for Life in history," one of them told me. "This is the first time a sitting vice president is addressing the event."

As I listened to the students in Atlanta speak to me about the need for interfaith social justice in opposing the Muslim ban, I couldn't help but think that those students that I'd seen in Washington, DC, likely also viewed themselves as engaging in interfaith social justice work. I may well have had more personal resonance with the way the students in Atlanta connected their diverse faith identities to the political act of opposing the Muslim ban, but the students in DC were connecting their faith identities with politics as well. And I know enough about American history and comparative theology to understand that it is a significant achievement to build solidarity among Evangelical, Latter Day Saints, and Catholic communities.

The more I thought about this split screen, the more I considered a different question: How much conversation and cross-pollination existed between the Atlanta gathering and the DC group?

Interestingly enough, if you looked at this from the perspective of religious values, you could easily imagine students heading from the pro-life rally to the airport to protest the Muslim ban based on the principle of religious freedom, an ethic that white religious conservatives have advanced for years.[1] Students of color, for their part, often belong to theological communities that lean toward the conservative end of the spectrum on the issue of abortion, meaning that at least some of the Muslims and African American Christians organizing the protest against the Muslim ban in Atlanta that evening could hold doctrinal views that might have nudged them toward the pro-life event that morning.

But I don't think the kind of religious values I mention above were front and center for most of the students. My hunch is that there was very little conversation between the communities that the DC gathering and the Atlanta group represented. I believe that on January 27, 2017, I witnessed American tribalism in miniature.

The two flags of tribalism

There has been no shortage of journalistic and scholarly treatments on tribalism of late.[2] We've learned, for example, that fans of different sports teams describe the very same plays from the same game very differently.[3] And it doesn't take much for someone to declare that this group of people is their team and those others constitute the enemy. Such solidarities can be determined by matters as thin as favorite colors. And, once we are told who our team is, we appear to enjoy punishing the other team even more than we enjoy winning gains for our own.[4]

Humans are, of course, tribal by nature, but tribalism in contemporary America is taking a particularly dangerous turn. Increasingly, we live in a nation under two flags: one America flies the Flag of Christian Identity, and the other the Flag of Marginalized Minorities. Both sides are imbuing their flags with religious meaning and symbolism. One side views Trump as a savior, and was able to mobilize 80 percent of white evangelicals as proof of their effectiveness.[5] The other side views Trump with equal potency, and also with a religious feeling, namely defilement.[6] One side wraps the cross in the flag, the other forms the flag into a Muslim headscarf and places it on the head of a steely-eyed female protestor.[7] We are sacralizing our tribal divide. Our culture war has become a holy war.

I believe this holy war is doing great damage to both sides, and to the underlying democracy that currently serves as their battlefield. The Flag of Christian Identity is, in too many cases, a thin veil for white supremacy and a naked cover for actions that violate common decency. We routinely witness egregious actions by men who carry the cross and call themselves patriots that intentionally harm the most vulnerable people in our society. Such behavior will not be soon forgotten by the people targeted, and it is unlikely to be forgiven by the children of those inflicting the pain.

With respect to the side that I sympathize with more, marginalized minorities, I am increasingly concerned that we speak in a rhetoric that actively strives to be oppositional. There are too many progressives who aggressively tag any attempt to find common ground with the other side as treasonous. Many more will simply not try to reach out at all.

To illustrate, on a recent speaking visit to the University of Tennessee, I heard the

inspiring story of a large rally against local white supremacists who had scrawled ugly slurs in a central location on campus. One of the organizers confessed something to me in a closed-door meeting the next morning: the protest against white supremacy had indeed drawn several hundred people, but you could count the number of white male students on two hands.

Either one concludes that the several thousand white male undergraduates at the University of Tennessee are budding white supremacists, or we recognize that there is something about the rhetoric we use to organize events for marginalized minorities that isn't compelling to a wider circle.

To say that I am not neutral between these sides is simply to recognize that our current tribalism is not just the result of different groups with equally valid views. Rather, it is at least partly the product of long histories of injustice, the desire of the people on the receiving end of that injustice for a measure of fairness, and plots by unscrupulous people on the other side to maintain positions of power. It is also a sign of my high regard for the Christian tradition, as represented by figures like Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

And yet, holy wars spare no one. Worse, they destroy the battlefield on which they are waged—in this case, the precious territory of American ideals and institutions. Paradigms do not only describe the world, they reproduce it. The more we insist on reading the world through the
lens of Christian Identity versus Marginalized Minorities, the more we instinctively divide those we do not know into opposing camps based on geography or religion or race or political affiliation, the more gas we give to a fire that may one day engulf us all.

I have no easy solution to the problem that we currently face, but I do have a great deal of hope in the enterprise of liberal education. Liberal education specializes in nurturing empathetic imaginations, in teaching humanizing language, in creating new paradigms, and in preparing citizens to engage with unscripted problems. Liberal education provides the best opportunity to help us find ways to speak of marginalization without exacerbating polarization, to speak of polarization without papering over marginalization, and to do both in a way that recognizes that we will always have to balance legitimate disagreements among different groups in a diverse democracy.

As I suggested earlier, I think a big part of our current problem is how we have sacralized our tribal divide. Consequently, an important part of the solution is a different way of thinking about religion, diversity, and the nation. I believe liberal education is in a prime position to lead an effort toward an interfaith literacy that can offer reconciliation and justice to a divided nation.

The religious history of liberal education

Higher education in the United States began with the opening of Harvard College in 1636, founded because the Puritans were concerned about leaving "an illiterate ministry to the Churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust."[8]

Over the course of history, religious involvement in the founding of American colleges would prove to be more the rule than the exception. In The Soul of the American University, George M. Marsden emphasizes that many of the colleges built in the late nineteenth century were founded by "men who came of age during the earthshaking

national conflict and who inherited a sense of calling to serve God and nation in a cultural mission. . . . Typically they did not abandon the Christian idealism of that heritage but rather adjusted it to accommodate their commitments to modernity."[9]

In a related article, Marsden notes that while religion is too frequently sidelined as an area of inquiry and reflection in many American universities, higher education still holds a great deal of promise as a sector for promoting what he terms "an inclusive pluralism," one that involves religious identity amid other important dimensions of diversity.[10]

Thinking through religious identity in a diverse democracy

Much of the most profound thinking on how to build a healthy diverse democracy comes from intellectuals in the liberal education tradition who are contemplating religion or are deeply formed by it. Michael Walzer cogently expresses the challenge before us in the form of a question: "How are we in the United States to embrace difference and maintain a common life?"[11]

From the great Jesuit political philosopher John Courtney Murray, we learn that the definition of civilization is people living together and talking together. A diverse democracy is a type of civilization in which the political community holds the divergent views of diverse groups. We should never forget that this presupposes the strength of the underlying political community.[12]

A democracy, Harvard University's Danielle Allen teaches us, is a society that requires people to build trust with, and thus talk to, strangers. In fact, the more willing you are to talk to strangers, the more powerful you show yourself to be. Children are told not to talk to strangers, a sign of the need adults feel to protect them. Presidents, on the other hand, happily talk to strangers, and look them in the eye when they do. Talking to strangers, Allen says, is "a way to claim your political majority."

In a diverse society, Allen insists, the strangers you talk to will likely be different from you. Such a society ought not to strive for "oneness." Allen explains, "The effort to make the people 'one' cultivates in the citizenry a desire for homogeneity, for that is the aspiration taught to citizens by the meaning of the word 'one' itself. In contrast, an effort to make the people 'whole' might cultivate an aspiration to the coherence and integrity of a consolidated but complex, intricate, and differentiated body."[13]

John Inazu, the Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law and Religion at Washington University in St. Louis, points out that not only will the strangers you talk to be different, they will likely disagree with you on significant matters, especially those that deal with religion. We need to cultivate what he terms "a modest unity" amid these deep disagreements and create a civic life that allows for dissent.[14]

Princeton's Jeffrey Stout says that managing disagreement is the defining quality of our society. He writes, "Democracy takes for granted that reasonable people will differ in their conceptions of piety, in their grounds for hope, in their ultimate concerns, and in their speculations about salvation. Yet it holds that people who differ on such matters can still exchange reasons with one another, and do both of these things without compromising their integrity."[15]

Jane Addams, the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, reminds us that engaging proactively with those with whom we disagree serves to enlarge us in the

end. "We know instinctively that if we grow contemptuous of our fellows and consciously limit our intercourse to certain kinds of people whom we have previously decided to respect, we not only tremendously circumscribe our range of life, but limit the scope of our ethics."[16]

Writing the next chapter of the American religious story

Of all the various forms of diversity that we speak of these days (race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, etc.), religious diversity may be the one that the Founders came closest to getting right. These (generally) wealthy, (loosely) Christian, (presumably) straight, (most assuredly) white male slaveholders managed to create a constitutional system that protected freedom of religion, barred the federal government from establishing a single church, prevented religious tests for those running for political office, and penned more than a few poetic lines about building a religiously diverse democracy.

The Founders' ideal made its way from pen to parchment more easily than from parchment to reality. For that, it took interfaith leaders and civic institutions—people like Jane Addams and organizations like Hull House and the National Conference of Christians and Jews (the NCCJ)—to coax a society that had long protected its white Protestant identity (often violently) to welcome the symbols and contributions of mid-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants, largely Catholics and Jews. In this way, America moved closer to the ideal articulated by our Founders.

The new religious diversity of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries requires us to write the next chapter in this great story, to move from Judeo-Christian America to Interfaith America. Learning how far we have come by diving into the history sketched above can inspire today's students to be the authors of that next chapter.

The power of religious language

Religious language has special resources to call us to justice, reconciliation, and community, simultaneously.

When Jesus is asked, "Who is my neighbor?" he responds with a story that elevates a man from a rival religion to a position of moral leadership. Jesus exhorts his own community to follow the Samaritan's display of kindness and compassion.

Gandhi, drawing on the spiritual resources of his Hindu faith, emerges from a South African jail with a gift of handmade sandals for the man who had imprisoned him, Prime Minister Jan Smuts.

Muhammad, when asked to resolve a dispute between different Meccan clans about who would have the privilege of placing the holy stone into the Ka'aba, suggests that they put the stone on a blanket and insert it into the shrine collectively, thus allowing each clan to claim credit while encouraging cooperation along the way.

Religious traditions teem with wisdom, resources, and language like this, and American heroes have often drawn on such wisdom in inspiring ways.

Lincoln's second inaugural address, for example, highlights the deep offense against God and humanity that slavery is, recognizes it as one of the central causes of the Civil War, and yet ends with a call for all of us to move forward together: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive

on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."[17]

Colleges as laboratories for diverse democracy

One of the most remarkable qualities of liberal education institutions is that they bring students from a range of identities, worldviews, and experiences together in an intense community during a formative period of their lives. The students celebrating Vice President Mike Pence's appearance at the March for Life in Washington, DC; the students organizing protests against the Muslim ban at the airport in Atlanta; and many more are sitting side by side listening to a lecture in Political Science 101 even as you read this essay.

Many political philosophers, including the ones quoted above, viewed college campuses as laboratories for diverse democracy. John Courtney Murray said that campuses ought to be places where "creeds (can be) at war intelligibly."[18] Alasdair MacIntyre highlighted that colleges are institutions where young people can be formally initiated into conflict and where arguments ought to be conducted at such a level of excellence that the broader society learns from the campus how to order its own discussions.[19] Danielle Allen writes in the Washington Post,

"Our civic culture is badly debilitated. Colleges and universities need to replenish their capacity to defend the intellectual life of democracies." She emphasizes that democracies and academies rise together and maintains that a central responsibility of a citizen is to prove oneself trustworthy to other citizens. Campuses provide the perfect opportunity for people to practice this essential craft.[20]

Since interfaith literacy (which I define as the knowledge and skills needed to negotiate a religiously diverse democracy) is a requirement of an educated citizenry, how should campuses accomplish the ambitious program of interfaith literacy I sketch above? I think the organizing principle should be reaching every student. Leaders in liberal education take pride in nurturing a certain set of intellectual qualities in their students, along with conveying key content. We would be embarrassed if any of our students were unable to write a clear paragraph or to recognize the significance of, say, Frederick Douglass or Seneca Falls. The same should go for interfaith literacy.

This means that interfaith literacy must be woven into the core components of campus life, from first-year orientation to general education, from service-learning projects to diversity programs. It should be an essential part of the college experience and part of the definition of being an educated person. A college administrator should be able to shake the hand of a graduating senior on her campus and have a reasonable degree of confidence that, as a result of spending four years on this campus, that student has acquired at least a passable facility in the dimensions of interfaith literacy outlined above.

In closing, I want to emphasize that liberal education has long understood its core mission to be strengthening democracy, and our democracy is in a moment of grave crisis. As much as we ever did, we need liberal education institutions to prepare the kind of leaders who can coax out of the angry cacophony of our society the finer music that Zadie Smith referred to in a speech she gave in Germany while accepting the 2016 Welt Literature Prize:

Individual citizens are internally plural: they have within them the full range of behavioral

possibilities. They are like complex musical scores from which certain melodies can be teased out and others ignored or suppressed, depending, at least in part, on who is doing the conducting. At this moment, all over the world—and most recently in America—the conductors standing in front of this human orchestra have only the meanest and most banal melodies in mind. Here in Germany you will remember these martial songs; they are not a very distant memory. But there is no place on earth where they have not been played at one time or another. Those of us who remember, too, a finer music must try now to play it, and encourage others, if we can, to sing along.[21]

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To respond to this article, email liberaled@aacu.org with the author's name on the subject line.

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Muslims at the American Table

Author
Eboo Patel

September 20, 2018

Ed. Note: *This column is adapted from the author's recent book,* Out of Many Faiths: Religious Diversity and the American Promise *(Princeton University Press, 2018).*

Chaim Potok's classic novel *The Chosen* centers on the friendship between two teenage boys, Danny and Reuven, who meet during a baseball game in World War II-era Brooklyn. The boys are from Jewish communities that have long taken pride in both their isolation from mainstream American culture and their disagreements with one another. But the anti-Semitism of the times shifted the context in important ways, catalyzing fractious and secluded Jewish communities to reconsider their relationship both with their nation and with each other.

Danny and Reuven spend much of their friendship navigating arguments between their fathers, rabbinic leaders of rival Jewish groups who have different interpretations of everything from the proper way to raise children to the right response to the founding of Israel. The arguments are fierce, but ultimately Danny and Reuven and their fathers come to an understanding that different interpretations of a tradition can coexist within a single community, and that said community should contribute to the broader nation. In this way, *The Chosen* is a story about the creation of American Judaism.

I find clear parallels between American Jews in the twentieth century and American Muslims in the twenty-first. Just as anti-Semitism was part of the context that shaped American Judaism, so the Islamophobia that emerged after 9/11 is accelerating the creation of American Islam.

The United States is home to different national, ethnic, and theological communities of Muslims that are at each other's throats elsewhere. As in any other religious community, there are people with varying intensities of devotion and different levels of ritual practice. And there is significant racial diversity amongst American Muslims, with approximately twenty-five percent being African-American, some of whom are no doubt the descendants of Muslim slaves, otherwise known as amongst the earliest Americans to arrive on these shores.

While almost none of the hot conflicts that characterize significant swaths of global Islam (Turks versus Kurds, Sunnis versus Shias, Saudis versus Iranians) have been transported to American soil, various communities of Muslims have long kept their distance from one another, with different ethnic and theological communities establishing separate spaces—mosques, schools, community centers, and so on. Less observant Muslims had a hard time finding any formal space at all. And, mirroring broader American dynamics, the racial divide was starkest of all. This is best illustrated by the fact that the largest immigrant-oriented Muslim organization (the Islamic Society of North America) and the largest African-American Muslim association (the Mosque Cares) long held their annual conventions in the same city (Chicago) over the same weekend (Labor Day) and barely acknowledged one another's existence.

But the Islamophobia that emerged after 9/11 and that has been supercharged by the overt bigotry of the Trump administration has catalyzed a set of shifts within American Muslim communities that resemble some of what happened with Jews in *The Chosen*.

One important part of this is the emergence of what I call Big Tent Islam. By this I mean a Muslim community that proactively welcomes adherents from a range of backgrounds—immigrants and African-Americans, South Asians and Arabs, women who cover and women who don't, city Muslims and suburban ones, Muslims who go to the mosque for the dawn prayer and those who only go for the Eid holiday.

No doubt one reason for Big Tent Islam is the requirement of consistency. Since American Muslims are regularly preaching that diversity is a value that the nation should uphold by creating space for religious minorities like us, then we have to practice this principle by being welcoming of our own variety rather than insisting on a rigid uniformity.

In addition to this big tent character, there is also a newfound emphasis on civic engagement and citizenship in the United States. The best illustration of this is the rise in prominence of an organization called the Inner City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) based on the South Side of Chicago. Its founder, Rami Nashashibi, who was recently named a MacArthur Fellow, is a Palestinian-American who grew up in a secular Muslim household but realized in college that the black heroes he lionized, from Muhammad Ali to Malcolm X, all seemed to find strength and dignity in the religion of Islam. His study of these figures deepened his own

devotion and inspired him to start an organization that, in Muslim terms, would be a mercy unto the world.

IMAN (which means "faith" in Arabic) has grown from an ad hoc group of twenty-something Muslim community activists to a sophisticated multi-million-dollar organization with a free health clinic, an art studio, and a biennial street festival that attracts well over ten thousand people. It partners with Pentecostal churches in the neighborhood on community organizer trainings, has held Ramadan iftars in the local synagogue, erected the first permanent memorial to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in the city of Chicago, and has done it all with significant support from just about every quarter of the broader Muslim community.

IMAN—along with scholars like Sherman Jackson, Edward Curtis, and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer—has played a key role in shifting how immigrant Muslims understand the origin story of the umma in the United States. American Islam did not begin with the waves of South Asians who arrived after the Immigration Act of 1965, or with those from the Middle East who came to work in Henry Ford's factories some decades earlier, but with the Arabic prayers of black slaves ripped off the west coast of Africa hundreds of years before. Their survival itself is an achievement, their cultural forms are a talisman, and the Muslims who immigrated from elsewhere are further chapters in a story that they started.

Together, we make up the most diverse community of Muslims on the planet. If the Hajj is holy in part because it serves as a gathering for Muslims from everywhere, then America too is sacred ground. We honor it by the kind of community we build and the types of contributions we make.

As we continue to build Big Tent Citizen Islam in this era of Islamophobia, I believe it is important that we keep our eyes on the long term. I think America is best understood not as a melting pot but as a potluck, a celebratory gathering to which different groups bring their distinctive offerings. The nation only feasts if each community contributes.

One interesting consequence of this era's rampant Islamophobia is that a wide range of Americans are disgusted by anti-Muslim bigotry and are standing up for their Muslim neighbors. Slowly but surely, the American Table is expanding to include American Muslims.

What will Muslims do with this all-eyes-on-us moment? One temptation is to encourage America to widen the "Judeo-Christian" narrative a single notch to something like the "Abrahamic ideal," a notion that conveniently includes one more group—us.

But we will not be the last religious minority to experience discrimination in America. Who knows which group will be next, but it is a near certainty that American bigotry will find another target once Muslims achieve what Jews and Catholics did, which is to become fully accepted in the American fold.

My prayer is that we work to expand the American Table for the contributions of communities who pray in other ways, or who do not pray at all, rather than simply advocating for an additional chair that seats us.

This is how Muslims live up to Islam. This is how a community becomes American. And this is how America becomes America.

Image: "I Am a Muslim Too" rally, New York City, February 19, 2017 | Photo Credit: B.C. Lorio/Flickr

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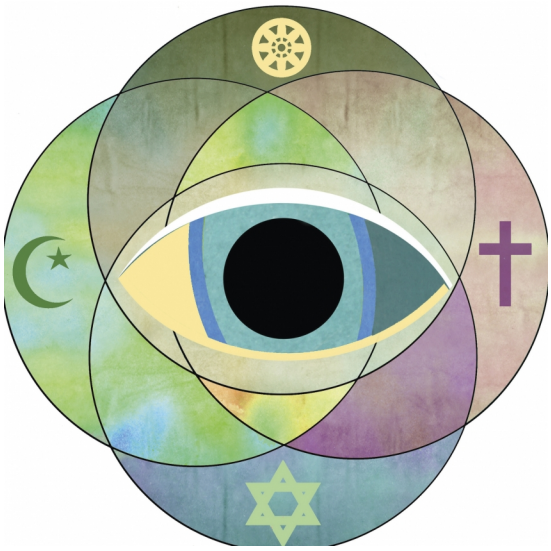
Eboo Patel is founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMENTARY

Faith Is the Diversity Issue Ignored by Colleges. Here's Why That Needs to Change.

By Eboo Patel | OCTOBER 29, 2018



Michael Morgenstern for The Chronicle

I speak on more than 20 campuses a year, and one thing that has struck me recently is that nearly all of the colleges I visit are expanding diversity education. Whether it's first-year orientation programs, new general-education requirements, or training that is mandatory for student leaders, engaging race, gender, and sexuality is fast becoming a standard part of a college education.

This is a positive development. Our society expects colleges to define what it means to be an educated person and to advance their students to that standard. Any reasonable definition of an educated person in this diverse democracy has to include knowledge of America's history and traditions (the good, the bad, and the ugly) with respect to race, gender, and sexuality, and the skills to teach, coach, build, heal, and lead in environments that are increasingly defined by that diversity.

After listening to the laudable plans of college administrators and faculty members for strengthening diversity education, I often inquire about how much time they are allotting to increasing their students' understanding of religious identity and diversity. Answers range from "I'm not sure" to "Probably not enough," along with the occasionally surprised look that the question was even raised.

What this means is that, in an era when colleges are expanding their engagement of diversity issues, and at a time when religion plays a central role in public life and global affairs, religion continues to be the dimension of diversity that many institutions leave out.

I believe this is educational malpractice. Religion has long been a vital part of this

country's body politic; failing to educate the next generation of citizens on the role of religion in our democracy is the equivalent of failing to teach doctors how the circulatory system works.

How should colleges teach about religion? I propose a civic approach, one that emphasizes the various norms, laws, central figures, key documents, social dynamics, and historical turning points that are essential first to understanding, and then to strengthening, a religiously diverse democracy.

It is important to know, for example, that religion is the dimension of diversity that our Founding Fathers came closest to getting right. Those straight white male slaveholders somehow managed to create a constitutional system that protects freedom of religion, bars the federal government from establishing a single church, prevents religious tests for those running for public office, and offers more than a few poetic lines about the importance of building a religiously diverse democracy. This history is especially relevant at a time when exclusionary talk regarding Muslims emanates from the highest office in the land. It helps students ask and answer the question, "What are America's ideals with respect to religious minorities?"

In a time of both growing diversity and widening polarization, a single session or an entire course on religious diversity not only offers a window into the American tradition but also helps students consider whether religious language might serve a unifying role in our era. This provides an interesting point of exploration into other religions: What unifying language and symbols might traditions outside of Christianity offer the United States at this time? Could the Muslim city of Medina — where the Prophet Muhammad and his companions were welcomed by the residents, and both immigrants and hosts were considered holy for their cooperative spirit — be such a symbol?

Religious identity has a special status in American law. If you are an inmate in Arkansas and you want to grow a beard longer than prison regulations allow, neither your age nor your race nor your sexuality gives you any standing in requesting said exemption. But if you are Muslim (or Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Jew, etc.) and say that you believe growing a beard is required by your religion, the U.S. Supreme Court will take your case, and you will win, 9-0. This special status sets up a dynamic in which religion conflicts with other identities, as in the Masterpiece Cakeshop case, in which a gay couple sued a baker who refused on religious grounds to make their wedding cake. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the baker.

Such controversy is all the more reason for college students to be educated about religious-identity issues. Diversity, as a friend of mine likes to say, is not rocket science — it's harder. It requires precisely the kind of broad reading and deep thinking that is the mark of a college education. And, because so much of our civil society is based on faith-

inspired social capital, being an educated person when it comes to religious-diversity issues connects directly to professional competence and effective citizenship.

Presenting specific cases represents an excellent civic approach to education about religion. It requires students to come up with their own questions and inspires them to seek their own answers. It is a liberal-arts approach to addressing concrete, practical, and unscripted problems. Research by the Interfaith Diversity Experiences & Attitudes Longitudinal Survey, led by Alyssa Rockenbach and Matthew Mayhew and administered by Interfaith Youth Core, has demonstrated links between using case studies as a teaching tool and achieving civic aims like students' gaining wider appreciation for a variety of religious identities and for positively bridging religious difference in general.

Colleges are in a good position to teach the interfaith literacy and leadership skills in a civic approach to religion. After all, they draw together students from diverse religious identities in an environment that seeks to affirm group identity, build a diverse community, expand knowledge, and deepen skills. In other words, campuses are mini-versions of religiously diverse democracies. As such, they can play a special role in helping the religiously diverse democracy in which we live be a place where diverse faith groups engage one another in a spirit of respect and commitment to the common good.

Eboo Patel is founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core, a nonprofit group that works with colleges on issues of religious diversity. This essay is adapted from his recent book, Out of Many Faiths: Religious Diversity and the American Promise *(Princeton University Press, 2018).*

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