

STUDY GUIDE

for

AMERICAN UNDERGROUND

by Brent Askari

Directed by Julianne Boyd

In the not-so-distant future, an interracial couple enjoys a visit from their college-aged son when a young Muslim woman arrives at their back door. She's looking for safe passage via a new Underground Railroad as Muslims are being detained and imprisoned. Suddenly, a government official knocks on their door, wreaking havoc on the family. They must decide how much to risk to save an innocent woman. This riveting thriller takes us inside a stark vision of an unapologetic America.

EDITOR

Leila Teitelman

CONTRIBUTORS

Brent Askari

Julianne Boyd

Carol Chiavetta

Jane O'Leary

Allison Lerman-Gluck

Rasha Zamamiri

Deirdre McKenna

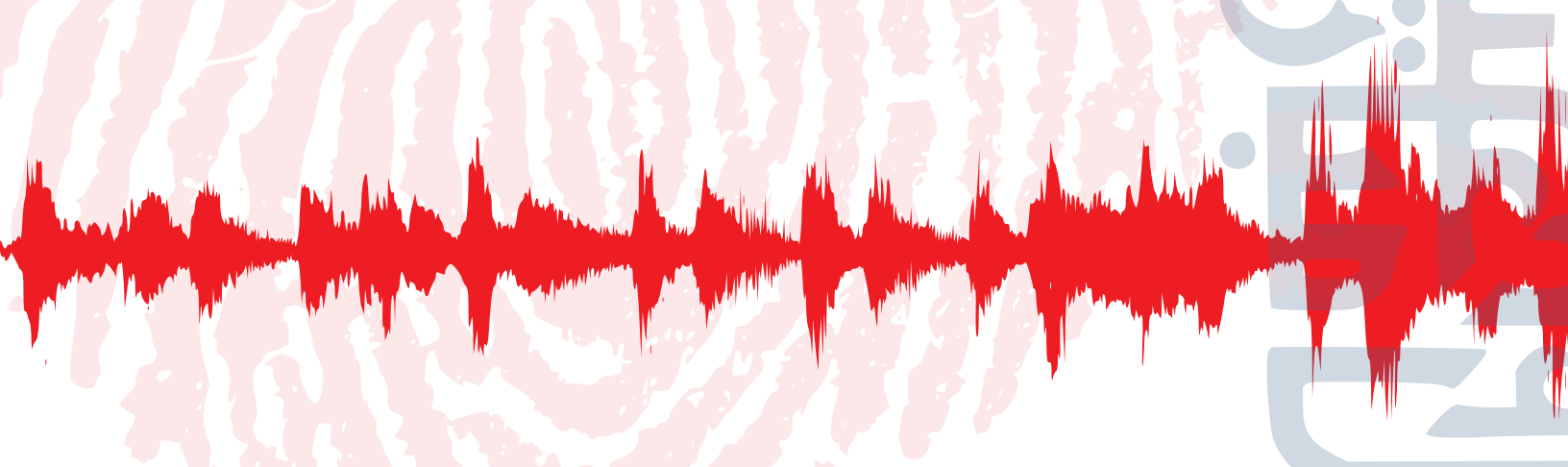
BARRINGTON STAGE COMPANY

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Table of Contents

Preparing for the Performance	Page 3
Before the Play	
The Day of the Play	
After the Play	
Theatre Etiquette	
An Interview with Playwright Brent Askari	Page 4
Director's Notes	Page 5
Time, Place and Characters	Page 6
Cast and Creative Team	
What is Islam? A Brief Overview	Page 9
The Underground Railroad	Page 12
American Persecution: Repeating History	Page 13
Religious Persecution	Page 15
Current Events: How They Relate to <i>American Underground</i>	Page 16
Selections from <i>The New York Times</i> , <i>The Atlantic</i> and <i>The Washington Post</i>	
Your Right to Religious Freedom	Page 17
Discussion Questions & Activities	Page 21
BSC's Educational Programs	Page 22



Preparing For The Performance

This guide is meant to be a practical education resource for teachers to draw connections between the play and core curricular subjects being studied in the classroom. The guide contains background information on the play, as well as suggested activities that can be used to explore the play's key themes either before or after viewing the performance. The activities and topics are organized in modules that can be used independently or interdependently according to class level and time availability.

Teachers can use this guide to:

- **Enhance student appreciation of the experience of live theatre.**
- **Introduce students to relevant cultural & historical topics that support classroom learning.**
- **Creatively draw connections to topics addressed in the play as they relate to core curriculum.**
- **Gather instructional tools, which can be used to plan lessons in alignment with national learning standards.**

BEFORE THE PLAY

Read articles from this guide with your class. If possible, have students read the play and use the guide to provide context for their reading. Go over the tips for Theatre Etiquette with your class.

THE DAY OF THE PLAY

Please arrive 10-15 minutes before the performance to allow time before the show for students to use the restrooms, which are located in the theatre lobby. It is recommended that you assign one chaperone for every fifteen students and ask your chaperones to disperse themselves amongst the student group to help support best behavior during the performance.

AFTER THE PLAY

Lead one of the post-show lessons found in this guide in order to help your students draw connections to the curriculum.

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

What is my role at the theatre? The audience's role at the theatre is to respond honestly and appropriately to the action on stage. Theatre is quite different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you're in a room full of other people and your behavior affects those around you. Those other audience members are there to watch the production. They can hear your responses, just as you can hear their responses. Most importantly, the actors can hear and see you as well and will appreciate appropriate responses. The theatre is the actors' workplace. Please respect their space and work the same way you hope they would respect yours!

Silence or turn off all electronic devices, including cell phones, as the glow from your device is distracting. It can be embarrassing if one goes off in the middle of a tense moment of the show. It will break the mood for everyone! Have respect for the theatre, actors and other audience members. This means no talking during the performance, no feet on seats, no kicking and no climbing over seats. The performers expect the audience's full attention and focus. Performance is a time to think inwardly, not a time to share your thoughts aloud. Talking to neighbors (even in whispers) carries easily to others in the audience and to the actors onstage. It is disruptive and distracting.

Please be seated promptly in your assigned seat. Remember the show needs to begin on time, and we can't begin until our audience is seated. Remain in your seat for the entire performance. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment—rude to the actors and your fellow audience members.

Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theatre you are attending and the location of the fire exits.

An Interview with Playwright Brent Askari

What inspired you to write this play?

Certain dark trends in our culture were becoming even more mainstream in recent years, particularly in terms of anti-Middle Eastern and Islamophobic sentiment.

I'm half Persian, and so I felt this kind of rhetoric and policy-making on an extremely personal level. I started having nightmarish visions of where this could lead, given precedents both here and in other countries – human history certainly provides no shortage of horrific scenarios concerning the persecutions of various groups. As a creative person, when something gets under my skin or burrows into my psyche, I feel that I have to express it. *American Underground* made it to the page as a kind of fever dream, something that I needed to sweat out and put to paper.

How do you feel the genre of “thriller” aids in the storytelling?

Well, I would say I'm a fan of genre storytelling, generally speaking. I definitely think genre storytelling gets a bad rap in certain circles, but I don't think there's an inherent dichotomy between telling genre stories and exploring serious themes. After all, the greatest writer in the English language, William Shakespeare, wrote genre plays – whether they were revenge tragedies, pastoral romances or histories.

But to answer your question: I actually don't ultimately know if I'd call *American Underground* a true thriller, but I think it certainly incorporates several thriller elements. And I think that the subject matter inherently lends itself to a certain amount of intrigue, tension and surprise. In the end, it probably just boils down to the fact that I like thrillers!

What do you hope audiences take away from this story?

I don't know if there's a single point or a message that I hope the audience takes with them out of the theatre. As cliché as it may sound, I hope that the work stimulates some good, vigorous conversations once the play is over. Obviously, the story functions as a kind of cautionary tale, and I hope it gets people thinking about the direction of our culture and our nation.

What do you feel are the most important steps in dismantling incorrect assumptions about a specific group of people?

That's a huge question! I certainly don't think I have a handle on all the necessary steps, but look – in the end, it's really about empathy, right? It's about putting yourself in other people's shoes. As theatre artists, we trade in empathy – whether as actors, writers, directors, designers, whatever – we're constantly connecting with other people's feelings and experiences. And I think that's one of the reasons we all come to the theatre – to witness and experience the stories of other people in a communal setting. And in general, the skills and pleasures we experience in theatre – whether as artists or audience members – have some correlation to our responsibilities as citizens. In my opinion, without empathy the whole thing falls apart...in a theatre, a community or a nation.



“...without empathy, the whole thing falls apart... in a theatre, a community or a nation.”

“American Underground made it to the page as a kind of fever dream, something that I needed to sweat out and put to paper.”

Director's Notes

American Underground takes place in the not-so-distant future when Muslims are being rounded up and persecuted. As the play begins, parents are preparing dinner for their son who has recently returned from college on a holiday break. That's the last normal action you will see in this play as the family's world is turned upside down when they try to give safe passage to an innocent Muslim woman seeking their protection.

Throughout history, ethnic and religious persecution has been enacted by people threatened by those they fear or do not understand. At a time when history seems to be repeating itself (what else can we call the actions of the government against immigrants on our southern border?) it is important to stand up and be counted – and do what's morally and ethically right.

Enjoy the play. Hopefully it will lead you to some new thoughts on what we can do, individually and collectively, to help all people be treated humanely and with respect – or the events in this not-so-distant future play might very well become a reality.

Julianne Boyd

DIRECTOR, *AMERICAN UNDERGROUND*

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, BARRINGTON STAGE COMPANY

“When I remember my family’s time in the American Underground, I realize: it wasn’t only us that was underground. I actually think America itself went underground then.” – Jeff, *American Underground*

Time, Place and Characters

Time: The not-so-distant future.

Place: A suburban home in Southern Florida.

Character

Rog

Anna

Jeff

Sherri

Kourtney

Actor

Alan H. Green

Natascia Diaz

Justin Withers

Rasha Zamamiri

Kathleen McNenny

MEET THE CAST



Alan H. Green (Rog) BSC: *The Royal Family of Broadway, Broadway Bounty Hunter, Romance in Hard Times*. Original Broadway Casts: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, School of Rock, Sister Act, Play On!*. 1st National Tours: *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, Swing!, Smokey Joe's Cafe*. Recent Regional: Disney's *Freaky Friday, Broadway Bounty Hunter* (Barrington Stage & Off Broadway), *First You Dream* (Kennedy Center). International: *Miss Saigon*. TV: *Unforgettable, Peter Pan Live!, 30 Rock, Law & Order: SVU, Guiding Light*. Lots of National Commercials. Deacon at Metro Baptist Church. Rice University Graduate. IG: @alanhgreen ALANHGREEN.com.



Natascia Diaz (Anna) BSC debut. NEW YORK: Broadway: *Man of La Mancha, Antonia u/s Aldonza*. Off Broadway: *Grand Hotel, Rafaella, Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris; By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* (Second Stage). DC: Fosca in *Passion* (Signature Theatre—2019 Helen Hayes Award); Betty 3 in the World Premiere of *Collective Rage* (Woolly Mammoth); Elektra in *Agamemnon and His Daughters* (Arena Stage); Savage in *Savage in Limbo* (MetroStage); *Jacques Brel...* (2013 Helen Hayes Award); Mariana in *Measure for Measure*, Emilia in *Othello* (Shakespeare Theatre). TV: *Oz, Nurse Jackie, Law & Order: SVU, Damages*. FILM: *Every Little Step* (self). More at natasciadiaz.com. Instagram: @ladydiaz777; Twitter: @NatasciaDiaz.



Justin Withers (Jeff) BSC debut. Theatre: *Days Of Rage* (Second Stage Theater, Dir. Trip Cullman); *Thirst* (Contemporary American Theater Festival). Film: *A Shot Through the Wall*. He is a 2018 graduate of Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University where he received his B.F.A. in Acting. He would like to thank his family for supporting his pursuit of the arts. Justinwithers.com.

MEET THE CAST *continued*



Rasha Zamamiri (*Sherr*) BSC: *American Underground* 2019 reading. She is an Arab-American actor, singer and voiceover artist who was last seen in the groundbreaking TV series *Ramy* on Hulu. Rasha was privileged enough to spend the last two summers at Ritsona Refugee Camp, Greece, working with Syrian refugees in the Campfire Project alongside Jessica Hecht and Arin Arbus. Past theatre credits include: *Kiss* (Yale Repertory), *The Who & The What* (Gulfshore Playhouse), *We Live in Cairo* (The O'Neill), *The Wife* (Berkeley Rep), *Hour of Feeling* (Humana Festival), *Aftermath* (New York Theatre Workshop & World Tour). TV/Film: *Madam Secretary*, *Looming Tower*, *Instinct*, *#Wargames*, *Sayid*, *Blindspot*, *Blue Bloods* and *The Blacklist*. Proud member of AEA and SAG-AFTRA.



Kathleen McNenny (*Kourtney*) BSC: *American Underground* 2019 reading, *The Birds*. Most recently she recurred as Grace Molinaro in *The Enemy Within*. Selected credits: Broadway: *The Father*, *Fish in the Dark*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Coram Boy*, *The Constant Wife*, *After the Fall*, *A Few Good Men*. Regional: *A Doll's House, Part 2*, Weston Playhouse; *Death of a Salesman*, Pittsburgh Public; *Outside Mullingar*, Philadelphia Theater Co.; *Equus*, Guild Hall; *Moon for the Misbegotten*, McCarter; *Richard III*, New Jersey Shakespeare Festival; *Beyond Therapy*, Westport Playhouse, George Street Playhouse. TV: *Blindspot*, *Elementary*, *Chicago Justice*, *Person of Interest*, *The Black Box*, *The Good Wife*, *New Amsterdam*, *Law & Order: CI* and *SVU*. Training: The Juilliard School.

CREATIVE TEAM

Brent Askari (Playwright) BSC: *American Underground* 2019 reading. Brent is a Persian-American writer and actor living in Portland, Maine. Brent's play *Hard Cell* was part of the 2017 PlayPenn development conference and is being produced as part of Geva Theatre Center's 2018–2019 Mainstage Season. Some of his other recent plays include: *Digby's Home* (Semi-finalist O'Neill Playwriting Conference, produced at Mad Horse Theatre); *Cocktails and Travails* (Winner of Neil Simon Festival's National New Play Contest and produced at The Theater Project); *Bending Reeds* (Semi-Finalist Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Blank Stage Living Room Series). Brent was part of HBO's New Writers Project and has written screenplays for Paramount Pictures, Marvel Films, MTV and Reveille Entertainment. Brent has acted in numerous theatrical productions across the country and is an ensemble member of Mad Horse Theatre Company. Brent also narrated the nationally syndicated children's television program *Animal Science*, which was nominated for a national Daytime Emmy in 2014.

Julianne Boyd (Director) co-founded Barrington Stage Company in January 1995. She has directed many productions at BSC, including the 2018 critically acclaimed productions of *West Side Story* and *The Glass Menagerie*. She also directed the 2017 hit *Company*, starring Aaron Tveit. In 2016 she directed two world premieres: Christopher Demos-Brown's *American Son*, which won the Laurents-Hatcher Award for Best New Play by an Emerging Playwright in 2016, and the musical *Broadway Bounty Hunter* by Joe Iconis, Jason SweetTooth Williams and Lance Rubin. Other productions include the world premieres of Mark St. Germain's *Dancing Lessons*, *The Best of Enemies* and *Dr. Ruth, All the Way*, as well as the critically acclaimed revival of Goldman and Sondheim's *Follies*. In 1997 she directed BSC's smash hit production of *Cabaret*, which won six Boston Theater Critics Awards and transferred to the Hasty Pudding Theatre in Cambridge for an extended run.

Boyd conceived and directed the Broadway musical *Eubie!*, a show based on the music of Eubie Blake, which starred Gregory Hines and garnered three Tony nominations. She also co-conceived and directed (with Joan Micklin Silver) the award-winning Off Broadway musical revue *A...My Name Is Alice* (Outer Critics' Award) and its sequel *A...My Name Is Still Alice*. She has worked extensively in New York and regional theatres.

From 1992 to 1998, Ms. Boyd served as President of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, the national labor union representing professional directors and choreographers in the U.S. She holds a Ph.D. in Theatre History from CUNY Graduate Center.

Elivia Bovenzi (Costume Designer) BSC: *If I Forget, Time Flies and Other Comedies, The Glass Menagerie, Typhoid Mary, The Birds, Kunstler, peerless*. She has designed an extensive repertoire of Shakespeare including *Much Ado About Nothing, The Rape of Lucrece, Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus* (New York Shakespeare Exchange); *Macbeth* and *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey); *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare on the Sound). Assistant design credits: Broadway revivals of *My Fair Lady* and *Fiddler on the Roof*; and for *The Father* and *Incognito* (MTC); *Plenty* (Public Theater); *War Paint* (Goodman Theatre); *Kiss Me, Kate* (Hartford Stage); *My Heart is in the East* (La MaMa). MFA: Yale School of Drama, where her credits include *An Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (Yale Rep/Berkeley Rep), *Cloud Nine* and *Richard II*. Elivia is currently an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Theater Design at Queens College. eliviabovenzi.com

Fabian Obispo (Sound Designer) BSC: *The Chinese Lady*. Off Broadway: Public Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, Manhattan Class Company, Classic Stage Company, Atlantic Theatre Company, Vineyard Theatre, The New Group, New York Theatre Workshop, Theatre for a New Audience, Primary Stages Women's Project and The Acting Company. Regional: Arena Stage, The Shakespeare Theatre Company, Kennedy Center, American Conservatory Theater, Goodman Theatre, Guthrie Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Huntington Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse, Cleveland Playhouse, Seattle Repertory, Hartford Stage, Long Wharf Theatre, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Westport Country Playhouse, George Street Playhouse, Virginia Stage, Playmakers Repertory Company, Syracuse Stage, Everyman Theatre, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Folger Theatre and Indiana Repertory Theatre among others.

Matthew Richards (Lighting Designer) BSC: *Time Flies and Other Comedies, The Glass Menagerie, The Cake, Kimberly Akimbo, Art, Elegies*. Broadway: *Ann* starring Holland Taylor. Opera: *Macbeth* at L.A. Opera. Off Broadway: *Is God Is* at Soho Rep; *Absolute Brightness...* and *The Curvy Widow* at Westside Arts; *The Killer, Tamburlaine* and *Measure For Measure* at Theatre for a New Audience; *A Funny Thing...* at MCC. Regional: Arena Stage; Baltimore's Center Stage; Cincinnati Playhouse; Cleveland Play House; Dallas Theater Center; Ford's Theatre; The Goodman; Hartford Stage; The Huntington; La Jolla Playhouse; Long Wharf; The Old Globe; Shakespeare Theatre; Westport Playhouse; Williamstown Theatre Festival.

Mariana Sanchez (Scenic Designer) BSC debut. Mariana is a scenic designer originally from Mexico with a background in architecture. Scenic design credits include: Off Broadway: *Marys Seacole* (Lincoln Center Theater), *Winter's Tale* (The Public Theater), *Fade* (Primary Stages), *Troy* (The Public Theater), *Frontieres Sans Frontieres* (The Bushwick Starr), *Oh My Sweet Land* (The Play Company). Regional: *All's Well That Ends Well* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Fetch Clay, Make Man* (Dallas Theater Center), *Manahatta* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Skeleton Crew* (Baltimore Center Stage), *The Wolves* (TheaterWorks), *Fade* (TheaterWorks), *The River Bride* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *War* (Yale Repertory Theater), *Winnie the Pooh* (The Alliance Theater), *Peter Pan* (Yale University), among others. She earned an MFA from the Yale School of Drama.

“I never knew how my family ended up in Massachusetts, where I grew up...when I got older, I explored some genealogy, and learned that on my mother’s side I had a relative who had come up North through the Underground Railroad. That kinda floored me. This thing that I had only read about in history books...was connected to my own family.”

—Rog, *American Underground*

What is Islam? A Brief Overview

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity, with about 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. Although its roots go back further, scholars typically date the creation of Islam to the seventh century, making it the youngest of the major world religions. Islam started in Mecca, in modern-day Saudi Arabia, during the time of the prophet Muhammad's life. Today, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world and experts predict it will surpass Christianity as the largest religion by the end of the century.

MUHAMMAD

Muhammad, sometimes spelled "Mohammed," was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 A.D. Muslims believe he was the final prophet sent by God to reveal their faith to mankind. According to Islamic texts and tradition, the angel Gabriel visited Muhammad in 610 A.D. while he was meditating in a cave. The angel ordered Muhammad to recite the words of Allah. Muslims believe that Muhammad continued to receive revelations from Allah throughout the rest of his life.

Starting in about 613 A.D., Muhammad began preaching the messages he received throughout Mecca. He taught that there was no other God but Allah and that Muslims should devote their lives to this God.



Calligraphic representation of the name of Abu Bakr

ABU BAKR

After Muhammad's passing, Islam began to spread rapidly. A series of leaders, known as caliphs, became successors to Muhammad. This system of leadership, which was run by a Muslim ruler, became known as a caliphate. The first caliph was Abu Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law and close friend.

Abu Bakr died about two years after he was elected and was succeeded in 634 A.D. by Caliph

Umar, another father-in-law of Muhammad.

CALIPHATE SYSTEM

When Umar was assassinated six years after being named caliph, Uthman, Muhammad's son-in-law, became Caliph. Uthman was also killed, and Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, was selected as the next caliph. During the reign of the first four caliphs, Arab Muslims conquered large regions in the Middle East, including Syria, Palestine, Iran and Iraq. Islam also spread throughout areas in Europe, Africa and Asia.

The caliphate system lasted for centuries and eventually evolved into the Ottoman Empire, which controlled large regions in the Middle East from about 1517 until 1917, when World War I ended the Ottoman reign.

ISLAM FACTS

- The word "Islam" means "to submit or surrender."
- Followers of Islam are called Muslims.
- Islam is monotheistic religion that worships Allah/God.
- Followers of Islam aim to live a life of complete submission to Allah. They believe that nothing can happen without Allah's permission, but humans have free will.
- Islam teaches that Allah's word was revealed to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel.
- Muslims believe several prophets were sent to teach Allah's law. They respect the same prophets as Jews and Christians, including Abraham, Moses, Noah and Jesus, with Muhammad being the final prophet.
- Mosques are Islamic houses of worship.
- Some important Islamic holy places include the Kaaba shrine in Mecca, the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, and the Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina.
- The Quran is the holy text of Islam.
- Followers of Islam believe in life after death and that there will be a day of judgment when Jesus Christ descends from the heavens.
- While the word "jihad" is being used negatively in the media, it in fact refers to Muslims' internal and external struggle to live out their faith as well as possible.

Islam: A Brief Overview *continued*

SUNNIS AND SHIITES

When Muhammad died, there was debate over who should replace him as leader. This led to a schism in Islam, and two major sects emerged: the Sunnis and the Shiites.

Sunnis make up nearly 90% of Muslims worldwide. They accept that the first four caliphs were the true successors to Muhammad. Shiite Muslims believe that only the caliph Ali and his descendants are the real successors to Muhammad. They deny the legitimacy of the first three caliphs. Today, Shiite Muslims have a considerable presence in Iran, Iraq and Syria.



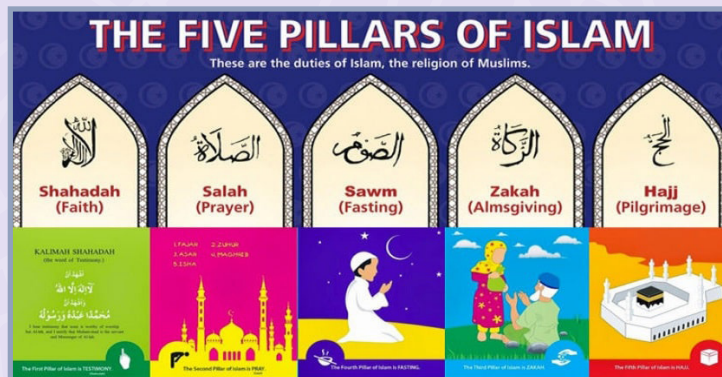
THE QURAN

The Quran (sometimes spelled Qur'an or Koran) is holy book among Muslims.

It contains information that is found in the Torah, as well as revelations that were given to Muhammad. The text is the sacred word of God and supersedes any previous writings. Muhammad himself was never taught to read or write, so his scribes wrote down his words, which became the Quran. The book is written with Allah as the first person, speaking through Gabriel to Muhammad. It contains 114 chapters, which are called surahs.

Scholars believe the Quran was compiled shortly after Muhammad's death, under the guidance of Caliph Abu Bakr.

FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM



Muslims follow five pillars that are essential to their faith. These include:

- **Shahada:** to declare one's faith in God and belief in Muhammad
- **Salat:** to pray five times a day (at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening)
- **Zakat:** to give to those in need
- **Sawm:** to fast during Ramadan
- **Hajj:** to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a person's lifetime if the person is able

MUSLIM HOLIDAYS

The two major Muslim holidays are:

Eid al Adha: celebrates the Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son for Allah

Eid al-Fitr: marks the end of Ramadan – the Islamic holy month of fasting

Muslims also celebrate other holidays, such as the Islamic New Year and the birth of Muhammad.

continued

MUSLIM CUSTOMS AND DRESS

The *Hijab* is one of the hottest topics in Islam. *Hijab* is the principle of modesty and includes behaviour, as well as dress, for both males and females.

Wearing the *hijab* is a very personal choice for Muslim women, and few people understand its meaning or complexity. The Quran makes a few references to Muslim clothing, but prefers to point out more general principles of modest dress.

Here's a Guide to the Various Different Types of Headscarves Worn by Women:

The word **hijab** describes the act of covering up generally but is often used to describe the headscarves worn by Muslim women. These scarves come in many styles and colours. The type most commonly worn in the West covers the head and neck but leaves the face clear.

The **niqab** is a veil for the face that leaves the area around the eyes clear. However, it may be worn with a separate eye veil. It is worn with an accompanying headscarf.

The **burka** is the most concealing of all Islamic veils. It is a one-piece veil that covers the face and body, often leaving just a mesh screen to see through.

The **al-amira** is a two-piece veil. It consists of a close fitting cap, usually made from cotton or polyester, and a tube-like scarf.

The **shayla** is a long, rectangular scarf popular in the Gulf region. It is wrapped around the head and tucked or pinned in place at the shoulders.

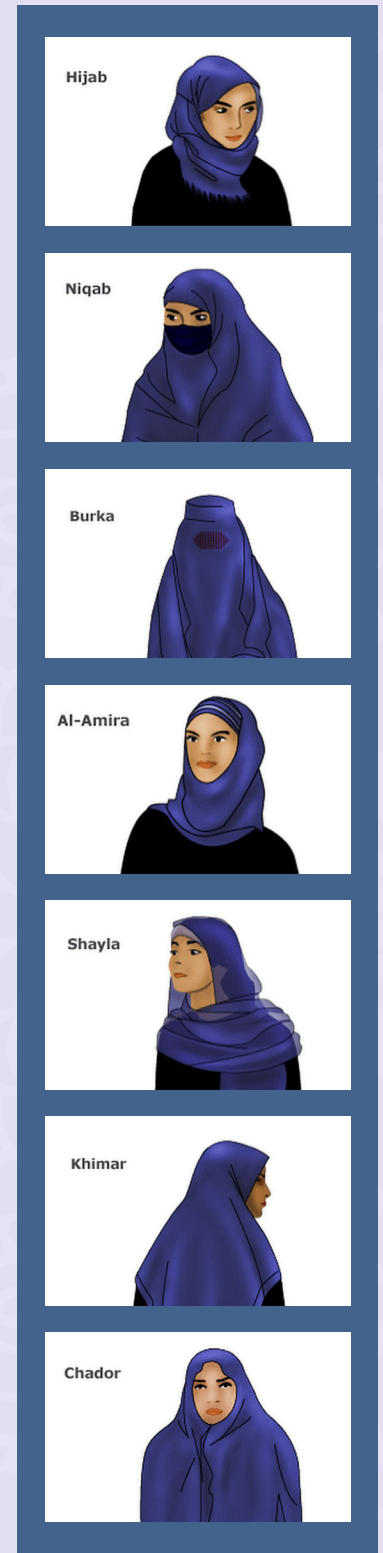
The **khimar** is a long, cape-like veil that hangs down to just above the waist. It covers the hair, neck and shoulders completely, but leaves the face clear.

The **chador**, worn by many Iranian women when outside the house, is a full-body cloak. It is often accompanied by a smaller headscarf underneath.

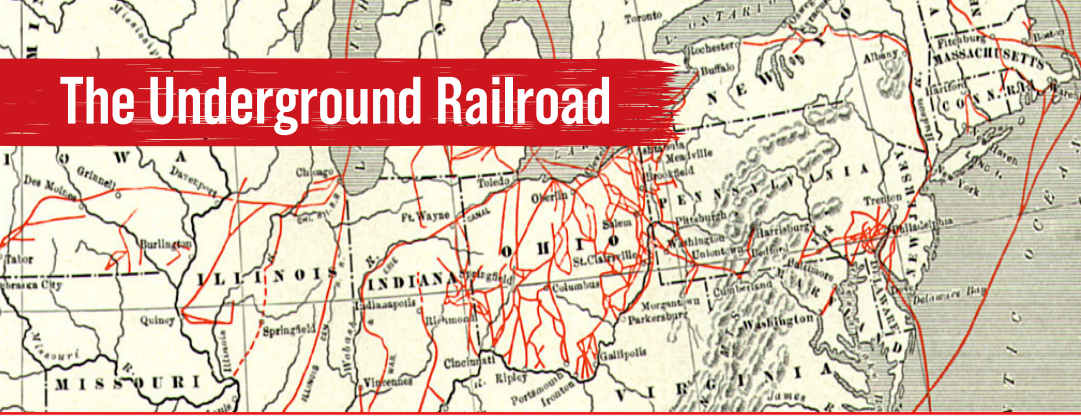
ISLAM TODAY

In recent years, Islam's supposed association with terrorism has sparked political debate in many countries. The controversial term "radical Islam," which was created by American media, has become a well-known label to describe the religion's connection to acts of violence but is incorrectly associated with Islam.

Muslims have overwhelmingly negative views of terrorist groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda and Boko Haram, which do not represent Islam. All religions have extreme sects that do not reflect the core values of the religion, however these misrepresentations have disproportionately affected Muslim communities.



The Underground Railroad



The Underground Railroad, a vast network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to the North and to Canada, was not run by any single organization or person. Rather, it consisted of many individuals – some white but predominantly black – who knew only of the local efforts to aid fugitives and not of the overall operation. Still, it effectively moved hundreds of slaves northward each year. According to one estimate, 100,000 slaves left the South between 1810 and 1850.

An organized system to assist runaway slaves seems to have begun towards the end of the 18th century. In 1786 George Washington complained about how one of his runaway slaves was helped by a “society of Quakers, formed for such purposes.” The system grew, and around 1831 it was dubbed “The Underground Railroad,” after the then-emerging steam railroads. The system even used terms used in railroading: the homes and businesses where fugitives would rest and eat were called “stations” and “depots” and were run by “stationmasters,” those who contributed money or goods were “stockholders,” and the “conductor” was responsible for moving fugitives from one station to the next.

For the fleeing slave, running away to the North was anything but easy. The first step was to escape from the slaveholder. For many, this meant relying on his or her own resources. Sometimes a “conductor,” posing as a slave, would enter a plantation and then guide the runaways northward. The fugitives would move at night. They would generally travel between 10 and 20 miles to the next station, where they would rest and eat, hiding in barns and other out-of-the-way places. While they waited, a message would be sent to the next station to alert its stationmaster.

The escapees would also travel by train and boat – conveyances that sometimes had to be paid for. Money was also needed to improve the appearance of the runaways – a black man, woman, or child in tattered clothes would invariably attract suspicious eyes. This money was donated by individuals and also raised by various groups, including vigilance committees.

Vigilance committees sprang up in the larger towns and cities of the North, most prominently in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. In addition to soliciting money, the organizations provided food, lodging and money, and helped the fugitives settle into a community by helping them find jobs and providing letters of recommendation.

The Underground Railroad had many notable participants, including John Fairfield in Ohio, the son of a slaveholding family, who made many daring rescues, Levi Coffin, a Quaker who assisted more than 3,000 slaves, and Harriet Tubman, who made 19 trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom.

Harriet Tubman



“I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say; I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

Born into slavery in Maryland, Harriet Tubman escaped to freedom in the North in 1849 to become the most famous “conductor” on the Underground Railroad. Tubman risked her life to lead hundreds of family members and other slaves from the plantation system to freedom in the elaborate secret network of safe houses.

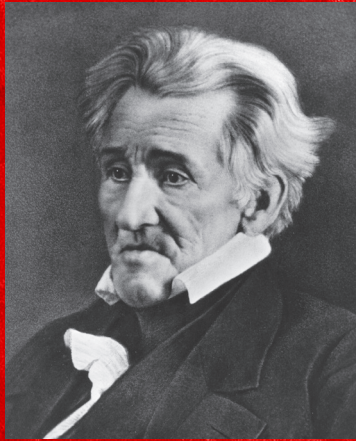
In a decade she guided over 300 slaves to freedom; abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison thought she deserved the nickname “Moses.”

During the Civil War, Tubman served as a nurse, cook, laundress, spy and scout. After the Emancipation Proclamation, she returned to Auburn, NY, and continued to help those in need. With donations and the proceeds from her vegetable garden, she raised money to open schools for African-Americans and gave speeches on Women’s Rights. Her dream to build a home for the elderly was realized in 1908, when the Harriet Tubman Home for the Elderly was inaugurated.

Sources: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html> • www.harriet-tubman.org/short-biography/ • www.brainyquote.com/quotes/harriet_tubman_401831 • <http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/CWPics/86139.jpg> • Photo of Harriet Tubman: Unknown photographer, from Tabby Studios in Auburn, NY.

American Persecution: Repeating History

America has a long and sordid history with persecution based on religious beliefs, race and ethnicity. Below are some examples of how the US Government has used 'camps' to control certain groups of people.



circa 1844: Andrew Jackson (1767 - 1845), 7th President of the United States of America. (Photo by Library Of Congress/Getty Images)

President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law in 1830.

The man Donald Trump has called his favorite president referred to Native Americans in his 1833 State of the Union address as: "Established in the midst of a...superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority... they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and long disappear..."

THE TRAIL OF TEARS

Half a century before President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law in 1830, a young Virginia governor named Thomas Jefferson embraced genocide and ethnic cleansing as solutions to what would later be called the "Indian problem." In 1780, Jefferson wrote that "if we are to wage a campaign against these



"The Trail of Tears" by Max. D. Standley

Indians, the end proposed should be their extermination, or their removal beyond the lakes of the Illinois River." However, it wasn't until Jackson that "emigration depots" were introduced as an integral part of official US Indian removal policy. Tens of thousands of Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Ponca, Winnebago and other indigenous peoples were forced from their homes at gunpoint and marched to prison camps in Alabama and Tennessee. Overcrowding and a lack of sanitation led to outbreaks of measles, cholera, whooping cough, dysentery and typhus, while insufficient food and water, along with exposure to the elements, caused tremendous death and suffering.

Thousands of men, women and children died of cold, hunger and illness in camps and during death marches, including the infamous Trail of Tears, that spanned hundreds and sometimes even a thousand miles. This genocidal relocation was pursued, Jackson explained, as the "benevolent policy" of the US government, and because Native Americans "have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits nor the desire of improvement" required to live in peace and freedom. "Established in the midst of a...superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority...they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and long disappear," the man who Donald Trump has called his favorite president, said in his 1833 State of the Union address.

THE LONG WALK OF THE NAVAJO

Decades later, when the Sioux and other indigenous people resisted white invasion and theft of their lands, Minnesota governor Alexander Ramsey responded with yet another call for genocide and ethnic cleansing. "The Sioux Indians of Minnesota must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of the state," he declared in 1862, offering a bounty of \$200 – over \$5,000 in today's money – for the scalp of each fleeing or resisting Indian. Around 1,700 Dakota women, children and elderly were force-marched into a concentration camp built on a sacred spiritual site. Many didn't make it there. According to Mendota Dakota Tribal Chair Jim Anderson, "during that march a lot of our relatives died. They were killed by settlers; when they went through the small towns, babies were taken out of mothers' arms and killed and women...were shot or bayoneted." Those who survived faced winter storms, diseases and hunger. Many did not make it through the winter.

Two years later, Civil War general and notorious Indian killer James Henry Carleton forced 10,000 Navajo people to march 300 miles (480 km) in the dead of winter from their homeland in the Four Corners region to a concentration camp at Fort Sumner, New Mexico. This followed a scorched earth

American Persecution: Repeating History *continued*

campaign, in which famed frontiersman Kit Carson tried to starve the life out of the Navajo, hundreds of whom died or were enslaved by white settlers and rival tribes during what became known as The Long Walk.

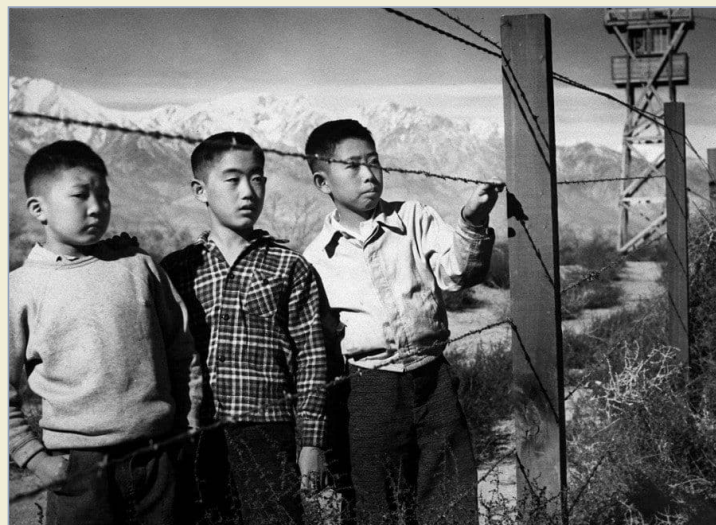
CONTRABAND CAMPS

At about the same time, the Union Army was re-capturing freed slaves throughout the South and pressing them into hard labor in disease-ridden “contraband camps,” since escaped and freed slaves were considered captured enemy property. “There is much sickness, suffering and destitution,” wrote James E. Yeatman of the Western Sanitary Commission after visiting one such camp near Natchez, Mississippi in 1863. “There was not one house that I visited where death had not entered...seventy-five had died in a single day...some had returned to their masters on account of their suffering.” At one camp in Young’s Point, Louisiana, Yeatman reported “frightful sickness and death,” with 30-50 people dying each day from disease and starvation. One camp near Natchez, Mississippi held as many as 4,000 black refugees in the summer of 1863; by fall 2,000 had already perished, most of them children infected with smallpox and measles.



CONTRABAND CAMP. PHOTO BY JAMES F. GIBSON.

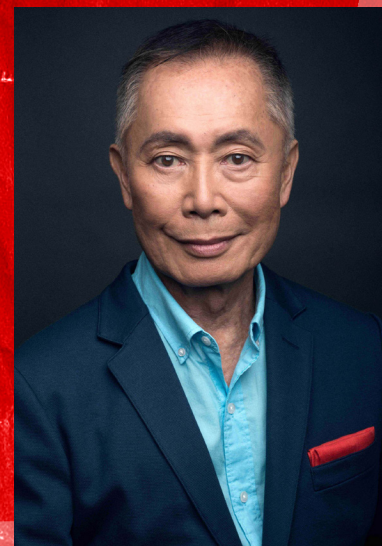
CONCENTRATION CAMPS FOR US CITIZENS



Children at the Manzanar internment camp in California in 1943; photo by Toyo Miyatake. (National Park Service/AP)

conditions were much better than they had been in previous US camps. Japanese-Americans weren’t so lucky. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, under which all people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast were rounded up and imprisoned in dozens of civilian assembly centers (where they were often forced to sleep in crowded, manure-covered horse stables), relocation centers, military bases and “citizen isolation centers” – harsh desert prison camps where “problem inmates,” including those who refused to pledge allegiance to the United States, were jailed. Internment would last the duration of the war, sometimes longer, with many detainees discovering their homes, businesses and property were stolen or destroyed when they were finally released.

During both World Wars, thousands of German nationals, German-Americans, Germans from Latin American nations and Italians were imprisoned in concentration camps across the United States. However, their race and relatively high level of assimilation saved most German-Americans from internment, and



Author/actor/activist George Takei.
Photo Credit: TOPSHELF PRODUCTIONS.

Actor George Takei was interned with his family for the duration of the war. “I know what concentration camps are,” he Tweeted amid the current controversy. “I was inside two of them. In America. And yes, we are operating such camps again.”

American Persecution: Repeating History *continued*

President Ronald Reagan would formally apologize and sign off on \$20,000 reparation payments to former internees in 1988.

During the early years of the Cold War, Congress passed the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950 over President Harry Truman's veto, which led to the construction of six concentration camps that were meant to hold communists, peace activists, civil rights leaders and others deemed a threat in the event the government declared a state of emergency. The camps, which were never used, were closed by the end of the decade.

WAR ON 'TERRORISTS' AND MIGRANTS

Although prisoner-of-war camps are not included in this survey of US concentration camps, the open-ended global war against terrorism started by the George W. Bush administration after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States has seen a blurring of lines between combatant and civilian detention. According to Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, former Chief of Staff for Bush-era Secretary of State Colin Powell, most of the men and boys held at the Guantánamo Bay military prison were innocent but held for political reasons or in an attempt to glean a "mosaic" of intelligence. Many detainees were tortured and died in US custody.

Many people think that concentration camps are in operation on US soil once again with the establishment of border camps. The Trump administration's attempt to portray child imprisonment as something much happier instantly recalls World War II propaganda films showing content Japanese-Americans benefiting from life behind barbed wire. Actor George Takei, who was interned with his family for the duration of the war, was anything but content. "I know what concentration camps are," he Tweeted amid the current controversy. "I was inside two of them. In America. And yes, we are operating such camps again."

"This week, the Department of Health and Human Services announced that it would handle the influx of unaccompanied minors by housing some of them at Fort Sill, an Army base in Oklahoma that held detainees of Japanese descent during World War II..."

"How the Trump Administration's Border Camps Fit into the History of Concentration Camps"
By Andrea Pitzer, GQ, June 18, 2019.



Photo by Sergio Flores for *The Washington Post*/Getty Images

Religious Persecution



Religious persecution is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group of individuals as a response to their religious beliefs, affiliations or lack thereof. The tendency of societies or groups to alienate or repress different subcultures is a recurrent theme in human history.

BELOW ARE ONLY A FEW EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION THROUGHOUT HISTORY:

- Persecution of the Jewish and Muslim people for 'heresy' during the Spanish Inquisition.
- Christians treated poorly by the Roman Empire for believing in what Rome called a 'superstitious' religion. They were commonly fed to lions at the Colosseum.
- Religious persecution of Jewish and Muslim people during the Crusades.
- Religious persecution during the European Reformation of those who went against the Catholic Church by forming new religions, such as Calvinism.
- Religious persecution in Europe causing pilgrims to leave and establish the American colonies.
- The Holocaust in Germany during World War II, when millions of Jewish people were confined to restricted housing areas (ghettos) and then murdered in concentration camps.

Religious and Ethnic persecution often overlap, as some races and ethnicities are more likely to follow a certain religion. In Judaism, for example, to be Jewish is both an ethnic heritage and an active religion. Some people may identify with the ethnicity but not the religion and vice versa. In Islam, people are often misjudged based on country of origin or race and grouped into a religious affiliation.

Current Events: How They Relate to *American Underground*

China Said It Closed Muslim Detention Camps. There's Reason to Doubt That.

By Chris Buckley and Steven Lee Myers
Excerpted from *The New York Times*, AUG. 9, 2019

HOTAN, China – The muscular young Uighur man sat uncomfortably, glancing occasionally at three Chinese officials in the room, as he described his state-mandated salvation in a re-education camp.

The man, Abduweili Kebayir, 25, explained how watching Islamic videos on his phone landed him in one of China's notorious indoctrination camps for Muslims for eight months – and how he emerged in January as a reformed man.

“Now I know the error of my ways,” he said, as his wife and daughter shuffled nervously around the living room. The room, like the rest of the eerily sparse house where officials who arranged the meeting said he lived, seemed almost staged, decorated with a family portrait, a potted plastic plant and a wall clock that had stopped.

His words at times sounded as rigidly scripted as the government's propaganda. “Now I know what is right and wrong, and what is legal and illegal,” he said.

In late July, the government said most detainees had been released from the indoctrination camps built to eliminate what it described as the threat of Islamic radicalism and antigovernment sentiment among the overwhelmingly Muslim population of Uighurs in the Xinjiang region in China's northwest. But reporters from *The New York Times* found, over seven days of traveling through the region, that the vast network of detention camps erected by the government of China's authoritarian leader, Xi Jinping, continues to operate, and even expand.

These camps, large and small, remain swaddled in heavy security and secrecy, despite the Chinese government's new pledge of transparency. There are five major ones around Hotan, a city in southern Xinjiang, including the one where Mr. Kebayir said he was detained.

Since last year, evidence has also pointed to a system of forced labor linked to the camps. Factories being built nearby provide a place to transfer detainees whom officials consider sufficiently “reformed,” like Mr. Kebayir now, while keeping them under government supervision. Critics say this is simply another form of subjugation.



Abduweili Kebayir with his wife and daughter. Photo Gilles Sabrie for *The New York Times*.

“Now I know the error of my ways,” he said, as Chinese officials watched.

The camps have already swallowed up one million Muslims or more, by most estimates, wrenching them from their families and homes and subjecting them to what activists, relatives of detainees and former detainees describe as stressful, even debilitating, indoctrination. Detainees, they say, are forced to renounce their religious beliefs and embrace the ideology of the Communist Party.

The center offered a model of how the Chinese government describes the indoctrination camps – a kind of boarding school and training center that turns local residents into loyal citizens. Former detainees have disputed this description of these centers, saying that life inside the camps is far harsher and that inmates included professionals and officials who were not in need of job training.

continued



The entrance to the re-education camp at Harmony New Village. Photo: Gilles Sabrie for *The New York Times*.

Current Events: How They Relate to *American Underground* continued

By his account, Mr. Kebayir was now earning a decent wage — 2,100 renminbi last month, about \$300 — stitching soles onto leather shoes at one of the new factories. Before he entered the camp, he said, he struggled as a poorly educated farmer, growing corn and walnuts, for which Hotan is famous. He paused awkwardly when pressed about details of his re-education. He said most of the others there were young men from the countryside, but he did not know any of them personally.

It was not even clear that the house where Mr. Kebayir was interviewed was actually his. The closet held nothing except for a few dresses, and the refrigerator was empty except for a plate of uncooked dough. There were no toys around for their toddler. Only hours later, Mr. Kebayir and his wife and daughter were no longer at the house and could not be reached, not even through the officials who set up the interview. One of them said Mr. Kebayir had business to deal with and had turned off his phone.

A Crime by Any Name

By Adam Serwer

Excerpted from *The Atlantic*, JUL 3, 2019

The Trump administration's commitment to deterring immigration through cruelty has made horrifying conditions in detention facilities inevitable.

The horrors detailed in the press were hard to believe.

Detainees described overcrowding so severe that "it was difficult to move in any direction without jostling and being jostled." The water provided them was foul, "of a dark color, and an ordinary glass would collect a thick sediment." The "authorities never removed any filth." A detainee wrote that the "only shelter from the sun and rain and night dews, was what we could make by stretching over us our coats or scraps of blanket." As for the food, "Our ration was in quality a starving one, it being either too foul to be touched or too raw to be digested."

Concentration camps antedate the Holocaust by many decades, having been used by the Spanish in Cuba, the British in South Africa, and both sides in World War I. Pitzer identified concentration camps, in short, as "places of forced relocation of civilians into detention on the basis of group identity." They are often created as a kind of collective punishment, although she noted, "Rarely have governments publicly acknowledged the use of camps as deliberate punishment." Detainees, she wrote, are "typically held because of their racial, cultural, religious, or political identity, not because of any prosecutable offense—though some states have remedied this flaw by making legal existence next to impossible."

"The argument over whether or not these facilities amount to concentration camps is almost beside the point. The semantic dispute obscures the true conflict, over whether the Trump administration's treatment of migrants amounts to a historic crime, whether future generations will wonder how those involved could possibly have gone along with it, whether there will one day be memorials erected to commemorate it, whether historians write solemn books about it, whether those looking back will vow never to repeat it."

"Nearly every nation has used camps at some point, though the degree to which their populations have embraced them and the devastation wreaked by each camp system have varied wildly," Pitzer wrote. "Their worst effects tend to be dampened in freer societies, where legal systems and legislatures have an opportunity to act. Yet a relatively healthy democracy is just as capable of instituting camps as the most corrupt Communist society or military dictatorship, sometimes with horrific results."

Americans have again recoiled in shock and horror over the past few weeks as observers who visited immigration detention facilities in the Southwest reported that children were being held in cruelly austere conditions. These observers told the press that the children at a facility in Clint, Texas, were sleeping on concrete floors and being denied soap and toothpaste. They described "children as young as 7 and 8, many of them wearing clothes caked with snot and tears ... caring for infants they've just met." A visiting doctor called the detention centers "torture facilities." At least seven children have died in U.S. custody in the past year, compared with none in the 10 years prior. More than 11,000* children are now being held by the U.S. government on any given day. As if these conditions were insufficiently punitive, the administration has canceled recreational activities, an act that, like the conditions themselves, likely violates the law.

"The argument over whether or not these facilities amount to concentration camps is almost beside the point. The semantic dispute obscures the true conflict, over whether the Trump administration's treatment of migrants amounts to a historic crime, whether future generations will wonder how those involved could possibly have gone along with it, whether there will one day be memorials erected to commemorate it, whether historians write solemn books about it, whether those looking back will vow never to repeat it."

Trump Asked for A 'Muslim Ban,' Giuliani Says — And Ordered A Commission To Do It 'Legally'

By Amy B. Wang

Excerpted from *The Washington Post*, JAN 29, 2017

Trump signed orders on Friday not only to suspend admission of all refugees into the United States for 120 days but also to implement “new vetting measures” to screen out “radical Islamic terrorists.” Refugee entry from Syria, however, would be suspended indefinitely, and all travel from Syria and six other nations — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen — is suspended for 90 days. Trump also said he would give priority to Christian refugees over those of other religions, according to the Christian Broadcasting Network.

Fox News host Jeanine Pirro asked Giuliani whether the ban had anything to do with religion.

“How did the president decide the seven countries?” she asked. “Okay, talk to me.”

“I’ll tell you the whole history of it,” Giuliani responded eagerly. “So when [Trump] first announced it, he said, ‘Muslim ban.’ He called me up. He said, ‘Put a commission together. Show me the right way to do it legally.’”

“And what we did was, we focused on, instead of religion, danger — the areas of the world that create danger for us,” Giuliani told Pirro. “Which is a factual basis, not a religious basis. Perfectly legal, perfectly sensible. And that’s what the ban is based on. It’s not based on religion. It’s based on places where there are substantial evidence that people are sending terrorists into our country.”

Others, including Trump senior adviser Kellyanne Conway and White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, have insisted it is not a ban on Muslims, but rather one based on countries from which travel was already restricted under Barack Obama’s administration.

Senate Democrats vowed to draft legislation to block the travel ban.

Trump’s executive order sparked massive protests at airports around the country Friday and Saturday, as reports surfaced that dozens of travelers from the affected countries, including green-card holders, were being detained.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit Saturday morning challenging Trump’s order after two Iraqi men with immigrant visas were barred from entering the United States at New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport.



Protesters stage a sit-in at the arrivals terminal at San Francisco International Airport to denounce Trump’s Executive Order 13769 in 2017. Credit: AP:ASSOCIATED PRESS.

On Sunday, the Department of Homeland Security issued a statement saying it did not plan to back off enforcing Trump’s orders.

Matthew Kolken, an immigration attorney based in Buffalo said there has been “a systemic bias against individuals from Muslim countries in the U.S. immigration departments” for years, including under the Obama administration.

“This isn’t unprecedented,” Kolken told *The Washington Post* by phone Sunday. “The unfortunate reality is the executive branch does have vast discretionary authority to determine who they are going to [allow in or not].”

Your Right to Religious Freedom

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

The First Amendment to the US Constitution says that everyone in the United States has the right to practice their own religion, or no religion at all. Our country's founders – who were of different religious backgrounds themselves – knew the best way to protect religious liberty was to keep the government out of religion. So they created the First Amendment to guarantee the separation of church and state. This fundamental freedom is a major reason why the US has managed to avoid a lot of the religious conflicts that have torn so many other nations apart.

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits government from encouraging or promoting (“establishing”) religion in any way. That’s why we don’t have an official religion of the United States. This means that the government may not give financial support to any religion. That’s why many school voucher programs violate the Establishment Clause – because they give taxpayers’ money to schools that promote religion.

The Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment gives you the right to worship or not as you choose. The government can’t penalize you because of your religious beliefs.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THE GOVERNMENT IS “ESTABLISHING RELIGION”?

In 1971, the Supreme Court decided *Lemon v. Kurtzman* which created three tests for determining whether a particular government act or policy unconstitutionally promotes religion.

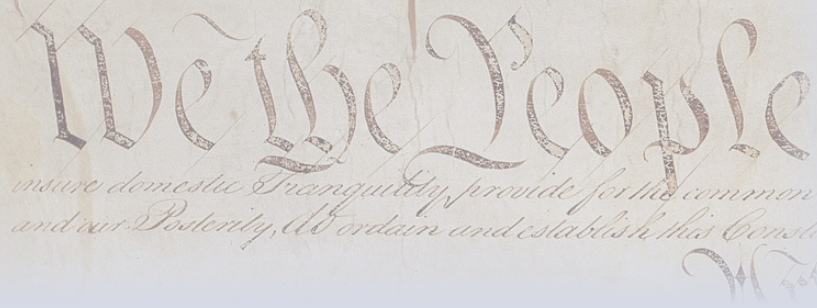
The Lemon test says that in order to be constitutional, a policy must:

- Have a non-religious purpose;
- Not end up promoting or favoring any set of religious beliefs; and
- Not overly involve the government with religion.

IS IT CONSTITUTIONAL TO TEACH RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

No. The public schools are run by the government. Therefore, they must obey the First Amendment. This means that while they can teach about the influences of religion in history, literature and philosophy, they can’t promote religious beliefs or practices as part of the curriculum. Since private and parochial schools aren’t run by the government, the First Amendment doesn’t apply to them.

Also, students can be excused from some school activities if they conflict with their religious beliefs.



“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

—from the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

CAN MY TEACHER START THE DAY OR A MEETING WITH PRAYER?

No. Prayers, scriptural readings and loudspeaker devotionals violate the First Amendment because they promote religion. This is true even if the prayer is “non-denominational” (not of any particular religion.) Moments of silence might be unconstitutional – it depends on whether or not the real reason they’re being held is to encourage prayer.

CAN MY SCHOOL HAVE PRAYERS AT GRADUATION?

No. In 1992, the Supreme Court decided in *Lee v. Weisman* that graduation prayers are unconstitutional in public schools. Think about it: graduation prayers would give non-believers or kids of other faiths the feeling that their participation in prayer is required. It doesn’t matter who leads the prayer – a minister, a priest, a rabbi, whoever – or whether the prayer is non-denominational; some kids would feel left out.

Student-led prayer is unconstitutional too. Just because a student or group of students leads the prayer, the graduation ceremony is still a school-sponsored event.

You can choose to have a private alternative event that includes prayer, like a baccalaureate. It just can’t be sponsored by the school. Student, parent or church groups can organize it, but it still must be held off of school grounds.

Your Right to Religious Freedom *continued*

WHAT IF WE PUT IT TO A VOTE?

That doesn't change anything. In the United States, each individual has certain fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion. These can't be taken away, even by "majority rule."

Think about your friends who have different faiths or no religious beliefs at all. They'd still feel excluded from their own graduation exercises. Or worse, they'd feel like the school thought your religion was better than theirs. Put the shoe on the other foot for a second and think about how that would make you feel!

IS IT EVER OK TO PRAY IN SCHOOL?

Sure. Individual students have the right to pray whenever they want to, as long as they don't disrupt classroom instruction or other educational activities, or try to force others to pray along with them. If a school official has told you that you can't pray at all during the school day, your right to exercise your religion is being violated. Contact your local ACLU for help.

IS IT OK TO CELEBRATE RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

It depends. Making Christmas stockings, Easter eggs or Hannukah dreidels is probably okay because, over the years, these have become secular customs that people of many different backgrounds enjoy. But a Nativity pageant, which is full of religious meaning, could be considered unconstitutional.

WHAT ABOUT RELIGIOUS CLUBS OR BIBLE DISTRIBUTION?

Student-organized Bible clubs are OK as long as three conditions are met:

(1) the activity must take place during non-school hours; (2) school officials can't be involved in organizing or running the club; and (3) the school must make its facilities available to all student groups on an equal basis. So your Bible club couldn't be the only group allowed access to the school grounds. Neither could your school let other student groups use the building for meetings and events and deny your Bible club the same opportunity.

The organized distribution of Bibles or any other holy book during the school day is unconstitutional, even if teachers aren't the ones actually handing out the Bibles, and even if they're not

used as a part of the school's educational program. That's because the school building or grounds are still being used to spread a religious doctrine at a time when students are required to be there.

That's what religious freedom is all about: you are free to worship as you choose, even if that means not at all.

That's what religious freedom is all about: you are free to worship as you choose, even if that means not at all.



Photo by John Brighenti.

Discussion Questions

- What does the title *American Underground* mean to you?
- What would it take for you to join “The Network”? or What would it take for you to sacrifice your own safety to keep someone else safe? What would and wouldn't you risk?
- Why does the playwright break the fourth wall to allow the characters to have a moment with the audience? What do we learn from these moments that is missing from the general action of the play?
- Having awareness about issues of injustice isn't always enough to lead people to action, as explained in the play and as evidenced in world history. What are three concrete actions that you can take today towards a future of equality, safety and justice for all?
- When it comes to injustice, what is the role of a bystander? What responsibilities do we have as witnesses to injustice?
- As Emma Lazarus, Audre Lorde and many others have said: “Until we are all free, we are none of us free.” What does this quote mean to you? In what ways is our freedom linked with the freedom of others?
- What does Rog mean when he says: “Nobody does anything by themselves. We're all interconnected”? In what ways do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- What does it mean to be an American? What are American values? How do these affect our actions as a country? As individuals?

Activities

Spectrum of Difference:

Ask your group the following questions and ask them to place themselves on an imaginary line linking the affirmative or negative to the questions below (or come up with your own). Group members place themselves on the continuum based on how much they agree or disagree. Once they pick a position on the line you can ask them their reasons for the choices made. If someone changes their mind after hearing someone speak, they can move based on their new position.

E.g.: YES _____ Undecided _____ NO

Sample questions:

- ***Should you stay silent when you see injustice happening if your personal safety is not being impacted?***
- ***Should you speak out even at the risk of your own personal safety?***

Story Circles:

Place students in small groups of 4-6 people. They sit in a circle and each is asked to share a story based on the following prompts. The story should be personal and true but not something that is so personal they do not want to share it with the larger group. When it is your time to share, everyone has to listen and keep quiet. Cross-talk is not allowed. Each person is given a couple of minutes to share their story on a given prompt and then they share back with the larger group common themes.

- ***Share a time when you stood up for something you thought was right.***
- ***Share a time when you did not stand up for something you knew was right.***

When sharing back it is helpful to look for commonalities and things that are shared in each story. Why does my story about protecting a friend relate to your story about standing up to a bully? How do these stories relate back to *American Underground*? It will be helpful to share the nuances involved in making these ethical decisions even when the stakes are low.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Commitment to Youth

The educational mission of Barrington Stage Company (BSC) is to awaken the minds, imaginations and creative power of young people by providing opportunities for them to experience the joy of live theatre as performers, writers, technicians and audience members. By fostering young talent and providing rich educational opportunities in the theatre, we would like to deepen and broaden our reach in continuing to serve the Berkshires and the larger theatre community.

BSC makes a significant investment in the lives of Berkshire County youth through the following programs:

PLAYWRIGHT MENTORING PROJECT (PMP)

Now entering its 20th year, the national award-winning Playwright Mentoring Project is an intensive, six-month, out-of-school activity that uses theatre as a catalyst to help underserved youth learn valuable life skills that can aid them in developing a positive self-image. Over the course of the program, teens are enabled to create an original performance piece based on their own stories in a safe and confidential environment where they can express themselves, develop conflict/resolution skills and create a supportive community.

In 2007, the Playwright Mentoring Project received the national Coming Up Taller Award from the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. This is the nation's highest honor for after-school and out-of-school programs in the arts and humanities. At the state level, in February 2015, Barrington Stage received Massachusetts Cultural Council's Commonwealth Award for Creative Youth Development for its quality educational programming, most notably the Playwright Mentoring Project, and for introducing youth to the power and joy of live theatre.

YOUTH THEATRE

Now in its 22nd year, Youth Theatre is designed to extend the professionalism of our Mainstage to local youth. Under a professional director and choreographer, students mount a full-scale musical theatre production that is presented 7-8 times a week for a 3-week run. Cast members also have the opportunity to engage in numerous community outreach activities and take master classes with industry professionals. The Youth Theatre program teaches discipline and spontaneity, and provides an opportunity for Berkshire youth who are passionate about the arts to receive professional training and mentorship.

STUDENT MATINEE/SCHOOL RESIDENCY PROGRAM

During Fall productions, students are brought to special all-student matinees and invited to stay for a talkback with members of the creative team. The school administration and faculty are provided with a study guide that prepares students for the production, which provides a springboard for teachers to build lesson plans tying their curriculum to the show.

KIDSACT! Jr., KIDSACT! & TEENSACT!

KidsAct! Jr. (ages 4-6) KidsAct! (ages 7-10) & TeensAct! (ages 11-14) are multi-disciplinary theatre arts programs in which students are engaged in the creative and collaborative process of writing, rehearsing and performing their own original plays and musicals. Students build confidence and self-esteem in a non-competitive environment. KidsAct! Jr. is offered in the fall and spring on Saturday mornings. KidsAct! & TeensAct! camps are offered during the spring and summer breaks.

BSC offers the following summer programs in order to develop the next generation of theatre artists by training youth onstage and off:

MUSICAL THEATRE CONSERVATORY

An intensive 10-week professional training program in Acting, Directing and Choreography where apprentices work and train with top-level New York directors, choreographers and composers during BSC's summer season from June–August. Students also have the opportunity to earn Equity Points.

PROFESSIONAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Professional paid internships are offered to college students and recent graduates interested in pursuing careers in theatre. Interns work with award-winning theatre professionals while spending a summer in the thriving theatre culture of the Berkshires.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about any of our education programs,
please visit: barringtonstageco.org/education-bsc