

**Muslims “R” Us**  
**Muslim America and the Islamification of Terrorism**  
**By**  
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**August 7, 2016**

When I first started thinking about giving this sermon some months ago, I had no idea the timing could have been more important. For, as you have no doubt heard, last week Presidential candidate Donald Trump made Islamophobic remarks after the father of Captain Humayun Khan, an American soldier killed in the line of duty, spoke negatively during the Democratic National Convention about Trump’s pledge to ban all Muslims from the US. Trump first suggested such a ban back in December, before he became the official Republican Presidential nominee. Then, in March, his primary challenger, Ted Cruz said, “We need to empower law enforcement to patrol and secure Muslim neighborhoods before they become radicalized...” right after the terrorist attacks in Brussels. Worse than such extremism, however, is that there are currently nearly 5 million displaced Syrian refugees in the world, most of whom happen to be Muslim, who are already being callously turned away by our nation even though their desperate circumstances are due to instabilities and violence that our own nation’s foreign policies and wars have helped create.

This refugee crisis has been going on for five years now, yet last year only 15 hundred of the 70 thousand refugees allowed into the U.S. were Syrian. This fiscal year, Obama wants to allow 10,000 in, which is still an embarrassing drop in the bucket compared to the hundreds of thousands desperate to find sanctuary from violence, hatred, disease, and starvation. Humanitarian organizations dealing with the crisis on the ground, like Oxfam America and the International Rescue Committee, have asked the U.S. to help resettle as many as 70,000, which is not likely to happen and is still less than the 80,000 refugees Germany has already taken in.<sup>1</sup>

As disturbing as these figures are, along with fascist statements from politicians like Trump and Cruz, the real catalyst for today’s message was a comment I heard MSNBC host Christ Matthews make while actually arguing against his idea of patrolling Muslim neighborhood. Matthews asked his guest, “Isn’t that just going to make them angrier at us?” Isn’t that going to make *them* even angrier at *us*. Without even realizing it, Matthews revealed his prejudice that Muslims in this country are not part of “us.” He considers Muslims in America to be a part of “them,” those who are separate from “us.”

“They are us!” My inner voice shouted back at the TV screen, and “Muslims ‘R’ Us” was born. You see there’s a little something in the U.S. Constitution that’s supposed to insure there is no “them” to be discriminated against. It’s called the 14<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/03/aid-groups-senators-us-take-in-65000-syrian-refugees>

Amendment, which forbids any State from denying anyone "life, liberty or property, without due process of law," or to "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

The problem is, of course, that ever since this Amendment was ratified in 1868, those who have been segregated from the rest of society—blacks, Latinos, women, gays and lesbians, transgenders, among others—have repeatedly had to struggle and fight to have their rights acknowledged by our society and its courts. Remember, when the Supreme Court finally agrees to hear such cases, often only after many years and decades of institutionalized discrimination, it doesn't pass new laws to assure those being discriminated against will be protected, it simply acknowledges that they are already protected by the law, that their Constitutional rights have been denied, that they have been denied "life, liberty, and property" and that they have not experienced "equal protection under the law."

Yet when these legal triumphs finally occur we act as if something great has been achieved, as if some new right has been born, that it is now legal for women to vote, for Blacks to live together with whites, for gays to marry, but in each case the Court has only ruled that is has been legal all along. This is why I have come to define injustice as that which forces others to fight for what is already theirs. Last week, for example, I read an excerpt from a speech given by Susan B. Anthony after she was arrested in 1872 for illegally voting in the Presidential election. In response to being arrested, convicted, and fined (which she refused to pay), Anthony argued, as she said, "I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen's rights, guaranteed to me by the national Constitution, beyond the power of any state to deny."

The problem is that there are always those who say they love freedom and they love the Constitution, but think it is only to protect "us," never "them," be they the wrong color, the wrong gender, the wrong sexuality, the wrong nationality, the wrong religion, and so on. But "It was we, the people," Anthony went on to say, "not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union." Women's suffrage is an example of how, despite the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, some Americans were denied their rightful liberties simply because of their gender.

During World War II, 120 thousand Japanese people, most of whom were American citizens, were removed from their homes and placed in concentration camps—or we can call them Internment camps if it makes us feel better. After all, we wouldn't want to liken ourselves to the Nazis. They had their homes, their businesses, their wealth, taken from them in the process, never to be returned, even after they were released and, decades later, our government finally admitted this despicable business was based upon racism and war hysteria. The Internment of Japanese Americans is an example of how, despite the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, some Americans were denied their right to both liberty and property simply because of their so-called race.

After the end of Slavery in our country, communities throughout the nation set up formal and informal systems of segregation and Jim Crow to prevent Black Americans from not only “mixing” with White Americans, but from gaining fair access to housing, jobs, education, and political power. And throughout the nation these systems of segregation were upheld and enforced by the legal system, including, often brutally, on the streets, by police officers.

Even here in Spokane, far removed from the segregated South, sales people always helped white patrons first, no matter who was in line first; blacks were not allowed to try on clothes or shoes in department stores before buying them; hotels turned away all Black guests, including entertainers like Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson, and Louis Armstrong; Black soldiers, many of them war heroes, were not allowed to come into Spokane during leave, and were arrested if they were; even those with college educations could barely get jobs shining shoes, as porters, or operating elevators; real estate companies, by law, were forbidden to sell homes to Blacks in White neighborhoods because it would diminish property values, and, in many cases, Blacks weren’t allowed to purchase property at all; and, in at least one case, the police got away with arresting a Black female officer for simply being in the City, assaulting her, holding her for days without allowing her to make a phone call, to speak with an attorney, or charging her with a crime.<sup>2</sup>

Today, despite many advances in the law since the Civil Rights era, this old form of institutionalized racism still abounds as we see people of color, especially Blacks, continue to be arrested and incarcerated at disproportional rates, and murdered in the streets by law enforcement with impunity. The continued discrimination against Black Americans in our nation, despite the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, is an example of how some Americans are not only denied their Constitutional rights to “life, liberty, and property,” but to their guarantee of “equal protection under the law.”

I could go on talking about how, as a nation, we continue to violate our own laws and fail to uphold our greatest values. I could talk about how, for generations, gays and lesbians and transgender citizens have been brutalized, murdered, and denied equality, including fair access to housing and jobs, even as the law stood by and watched, or, at times, participated in such brutality and injustice. I could talk about how one political party, in particular, has been allowed to pass racist and draconian voter ID laws in recent years to keep minorities from easily voting. I could talk about the rising number of homeless in our country who, due to income inequality, often can’t vote at all because they are no longer property owners. I can talk about how women, representing half our population, remain underpaid and underrepresented in positions of power. I can talk about how, under the law, corporations are treated as persons with all the rights and none of the responsibilities of other citizens, while

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<sup>2</sup> See, Mack, Dwayne A., *Black Spokane: The Civil Right’s Struggle in the Inland Northwest*, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman Publishing, USA, 2014.

the poorest among us are treated as second class, subhuman persons who simply can't afford to pay what it costs to receive fairness and justice in our country.

But today I want to focus more on how some American who, because of their religion, live, at the very least, in fear of having their neighbors turn against them, of being beaten in the streets, of having their homes vandalized, or their businesses destroyed, or their places of worship desecrated, even as some politicians feel it's okay to fuel the fires of fear and hate against them. I want to talk about how some Americans, because of their religion, fear they may be arrested in the near future because of their beliefs, or interned in government sanctioned concentration camps, or exiled to another land, far away from their homes and families and friends.

I am compelled to speak about this today because it is not right, it is not moral, and it is not American; and because I am appalled that people like Donald Trump and Ted Cruz who are seeking positions of power are so willing to violate our most supreme principle, liberty and justice for all, in the name of some twisted ethic. They get on their high horses and ask that we repeat the Japanese internment camps of WWII all over again, or that we erect our own version of the Berlin Wall to keep out our neighbors, or that we turn our police officers into a Gestapo that watches over Muslim citizens. But their horses are not high. They are not even swayback Shetland ponies. Their suggestions are beneath the belly of the lowest worm, and certainly beneath the dignity of anyone professing to stand for what America is supposed to be about.

Given that the U.S. Census Bureau doesn't ask questions about religion, it is somewhat difficult to estimate the precise number of American Muslims, but, according to the Pew Research center, there are more than three million Muslims in the United States, a number that has been steadily on the rise and is expected to double by 2050. When this occurs it will make Islam the second largest religion in America, after Christianity, of course, surpassing Judaism, and maintaining a more decisive lead over Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism than it already has.

Although they remain a small percentage of the overall population, just over 1 percent, Muslims are a part of the American melting pot, and, as Americans, which the majority of them are, they have a right to the same benefits of society as everyone else, including equal treatment and protection under the law. Yet, the kneejerk association of all Muslims with terrorism is no different than the cruel, unjust, and devastating association of all Japanese Americans with the bombing of Pearl Harbor not too long ago. Those who so easily Islamify terrorism in this way, blaming the actions of religious extremists on an entire religion, conveniently forget that more Muslims have been killed by terrorism since the events of 9-11-2001 than anyone else, and more Muslims die fighting against terrorism around the world than anyone else too. According to a 2011 study by the National Counterterrorism

Center, "Muslims suffered between 82 and 97% of the terrorism related fatalities over the past five years."<sup>3</sup>

Yet too many of us witness heinous acts terrorism around the world conducted by extremists in the name of Islam and begin to blame such violence on all Muslims. Thus, the solution seems easy, make a law that keeps new Muslims out and exile or, at least, corral and keep a close eye on those who are already here. But most of those who are already here are here because they belong here, because they live here, because they are Americans and, as such, are guaranteed equal protection and treatment under the law. Alas, as we have seen, our society and our government has often ignored and denied these rights to certain groups, only to acknowledge the injustice of it decades after the damage has already been done.

Although we are not there quite yet, the proposed bans against Muslims, and suggestions that their neighborhoods receive special scrutiny by the police, only state what many are already prepared to do, even if it does violate our Constitution yet again. They say they are willing to violate freedom in the name of safety, yet, oddly, continue to do nothing to keep military style assault weapons off our streets and out of the hands of anyone willing to do violence with them. Just a few weeks ago, in response to the worst mass shooting in U.S. history at a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, House Democrats staged a sit-in in a desperate effort to finally get reasonable gun control legislation passed. But because the shooter in this case was a Muslim, the Republicans in Congress argued the Democrats had no plan to deal with the real problem, terrorism.

They eagerly insinuate that all Muslims are potential threats and must be singled out and watched; and, because of this horrific instance in Orlando, they now seem to be suggesting the problem isn't gun control but Muslim terrorists. Yet they seem to be ignoring the fact the majority of mass shootings in our nation are conducted by non-Muslim assailants. Shootings like those that took place at a movie theatre in Aurora, Colorado, at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, at an AMC Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and too many others, were at the hands of non-Muslim domestic terrorists, yet nothing has been done to prevent their weapon of choice, a weapon of war, a gun made for no other purpose than mass killing, from ending up in the hands of anyone who wants one.

Meanwhile, there are countless Muslim Americans who are good neighbors, students, business owners, entertainers, authors, artists, athletes, and, otherwise, outstanding members of our society. Perhaps, most notably, there are even two Muslim Americans currently serving in Congress, Representative Keith Ellison of Minnesota, who was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, and Representative Andre

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<sup>3</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence National Counterterrorism Center Washington, DC, 20511, March 12, 2012.

Carson, a native of Indianapolis, Indiana, who are among numerous other Muslim Americans serving in politics around the nation.

And, again, just this past week, we were reminded there are Muslim Americans serving in the U.S. military, like Captain Kahn who gave his life for the country he loved. Just a couple days ago I heard his father, Khizr Kahn, a Harvard educated American attorney, interviewed on NPR during which he removed the pocket copy of the U.S. Constitution he always carries on his person. When asked to read his favorite part, choking back tears, he began reading the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, especially emphasizing the phrase, *equal protection of the laws*.

“These last four or five words mean so much to me,” he said, “and I invite your audience to look at these few words, not just look at them, try to understand the impact of these four or five words in our life today. Each and every citizen of this country, women, children, immigrants, Muslims, Hindus, all religions, all faiths, all genders, everybody is impacted by these four or five words of the Constitution.” Then, when asked if he would have done things differently in light of all the controversy his remarks have caused, Kahn said, “I will do it a million times, I will do it louder, I’ll do it a hundred million times... Now is the time for the rest of the world to see the true America, the decent America, the good America. Somehow, some of the political pandering and Donald Trump’s rhetoric had put a bad name to my country and I will stand to correct it. I will do it a million times.”<sup>4</sup>

Spoken like a true American, yet I fear for Khizr Khan and his family, and for families like his, Muslim American families, because history has proven there are some in or nation all too willing to violated the freedoms of others. There have been times in our nation when some Americans enslaved other Americans; when some Americans wouldn’t allow other Americans to vote; when some Americans placed other Americans in concentration camps and stole their homes, and businesses, and wealth; when some Americans wouldn’t let other Americans have equal access to public accommodations, or to housing, work, and schools; when some Americans wouldn’t allow other Americans to marry whom they love; when some Americans locked away other Americans or killed them in the streets; and now, some Americans are asking other Americans to go down this road again, by denying the right of a few other Americans to have “equal protection of the laws.”

I do not know if this will happen, but I have been concerned for my Muslim American neighbors ever since 9/11 and have stood up for and spoken for their rights on many occasions since. The sort of plans Trump and Cruz propose may or may not come to fruition, but, in either case, I will not be blindsided. I will continue to stand in solidarity with my fellow Americans. Like my neighbor, Khizr Kahn, I will do so a million times if necessary because I believe every American, and, ultimately,

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2016/08/05/488858174/khizr-khan-says-he-would-live-this-week-a-hundred-million-times-over>

## Muslims “R” Us

every person in the world should be treated equally. I will do so because I believe Muslims are *us*.