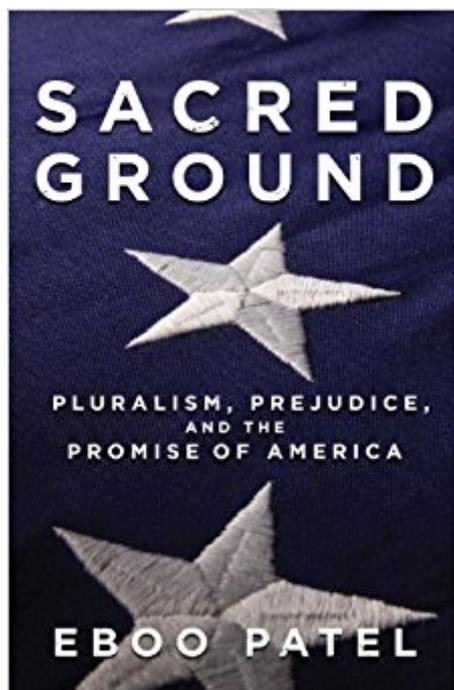


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Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, And The Promise Of America



Synopsis

There is no better time to stand up for your values than when they are under attack. In the decade following the attacks of 9/11, suspicion and animosity toward American Muslims has increased rather than subsided. Alarmist, hateful rhetoric once relegated to the fringes of political discourse has now become frighteningly mainstream, with pundits and politicians routinely invoking the specter of Islam as a menacing, deeply anti-American force. In *Sacred Ground*, author and renowned interfaith leader Eboo Patel says this prejudice is not just a problem for Muslims but a challenge to the very idea of America. Patel shows us that Americans from George Washington to Martin Luther King Jr. have been interfaith leaders, illustrating how the forces of pluralism in America have time and again defeated the forces of prejudice. And now a new generation needs to rise up and confront the anti-Muslim prejudice of our era. To this end, Patel offers a primer in the art and science of interfaith work, bringing to life the growing body of research on how faith can be a bridge of cooperation rather than a barrier of division and sharing stories from the frontlines of interfaith activism. Patel asks us to share in his vision of a better America—a robustly pluralistic country in which our commonalities are more important than our differences, and in which difference enriches, rather than threatens, our religious traditions. Pluralism, Patel boldly argues, is at the heart of the American project, and this visionary book will inspire Americans of all faiths to make this country a place where diverse traditions can thrive side by side. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

One of my greatest joys in working with Eboo Patel is watching him think. He is the sharpest wit in most of the rooms he enters, and if you manage to catch him with a surprising or unusual question after a public talk or small-group gathering, you can see his mind whirring as he finds not only a meaningful answer, but also a more compelling framework for your question. In *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America*, Eboo gives us all the gift of seeing him think. It seems apparent that he is in the process of re-framing not merely a question, but the premises of the entire interfaith movement, of which he has long been a key part. The core of his new thinking comes out in his chapter, "The Science of Interfaith Cooperation." Reflecting humbly on a moment when he found himself unable to respond adequately to a funder's request for measurable outcomes, he poses a set of questions that the Interfaith Youth Core has already begun answering, and to which all members of the interfaith movement must attend: "How do we measure effectiveness in interfaith work? How do we track progress? What outcomes are we after, and how do we know we are reaching them?" In response to this question, Eboo looks to quantitative, rather than qualitative evidence -- a major shift not in his own personal research and reading, but in his description of the interfaith movement and why it counts. Therein lies a gem, which may in time spawn a transformation within the interfaith movement and how it understands itself: the interfaith triangle. Says Patel, "The more I studied this area, the more I started to see attitudes, knowledge, and relationships as three sides of a triangle."

A book club of Muslim, Christian and Buddhist women chose this to read and I have not heard their responses yet but look forward to hearing what others think. I think this book is tedious and the author's good ideas are buried in lots of extraneous verbiage about himself and the situations he is describing often beleaguering the point of the need for dialogue. He spends about 1/3 of the book talking about the Córdoba Houst controversy, which I remember. While I think this suggestion probably arose out of good intention, I find it difficult to hear Patel talk about the great suffering of Muslims and then show so little understanding of the suffering of those whose loved ones and community died in the 9/11 terrorist attack, or in the ongoing aftermath of the illnesses many of those first responders still deal with. Then there is his assertion that Spain enjoyed 700 years of happy, contented and peaceful Muslim rule that was embodied in the art of Córdoba. At least three different waves of Muslim invaders from North Africa overwhelmed Christian Spain and while some Christians and Jews survived and continued to live there, they were heavily taxed and performed important functions, like banking, for the Muslims. Peace at the point of a sword is hardly happy co-existence. - I did not find his 3 keys to participating in a TV interview gratifying when number two

is "never answer the question." I have seen this technique used and invariably find it annoying to disingenuous. - He makes a comment about thinking universities should offer degrees in interfaith and seems surprised when a State university president says "We don't discuss religion." Perhaps the concept of separation of church and state needs to be clarified for him.

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