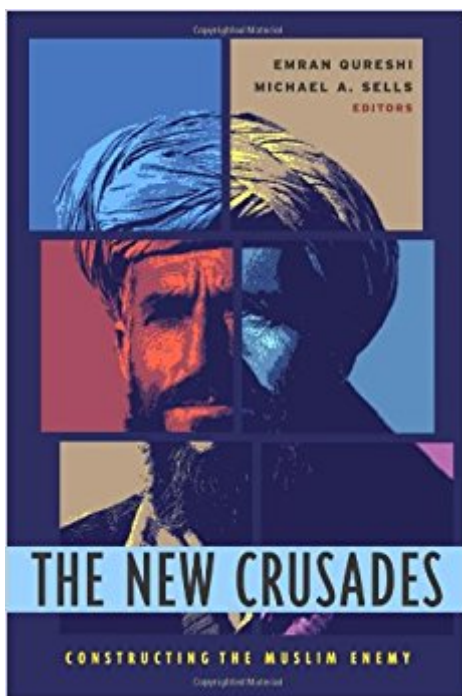


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The New Crusades: Constructing The Muslim Enemy



Synopsis

Not since the Crusades of the Middle Ages has Islam evoked the degree of fear, hostility, and ethnic and religious stereotyping that is evident throughout Western culture today. As conflicts continue to proliferate around the globe, the perception of a colossal, unyielding, and unavoidable struggle between Islam and the West has intensified. These numerous conflicts, both actual and ideological, have revived fears of an ongoing "clash of civilizations" — an intractable and irreconcilable conflict of values between Western cultures and an Islam that is portrayed as hostile and alien. The New Crusades takes head-on the idea of an emergent "Cold War" between Islam and the West. It explores the historical, political, and institutional forces that have raised the specter of a threatening and monolithic Muslim enemy and provides a nuanced critique of much received wisdom on the topic, particularly the "clash of civilizations" theory. Bringing together twelve of the most influential thinkers in Middle Eastern and religious studies — including Edward Said, Roy Mottahedeh, and Fatema Mernissi — this timely collection confronts such depictions of the Arab-Islamic world, showing their inner workings and how they both empower and shield from scrutiny Islamic radicals who operate from similar paradigms of inevitable and absolute conflict.

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Customer Reviews

A book of major importance.... Essential. (Choice) Sophisticated, subtle, richly documented, and wide-ranging. (L. Carl Brown Foreign Affairs) This is an important book... for those engaged in challenging the assumptions that lie behind this current 'war on terror'. (The Muslim World Book Review) The New Crusades assembles expert knowledges of some tangled historical roots... this

work deserves as wide a readership as possible. (Max Weiss Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism) An insightful work. (Roxanne D. Marcotte Studies in Religion) An important book at an important time in American social thought. (Daniel L. Smith-Christopher Studies in Contemporary Islam)

The New Crusades explores the historical, political, and institutional forces that have raised the specter of a threatening and monolithic Muslim enemy. Bringing together twelve of the most influential thinkers in Middle Eastern and religious studies— including Edward Said, Roy Mottahedeh, and Fatema Mernissi— this timely collection confronts stereotyped depictions of the Arab-Islamic world, offering instead an informed, critical, and realistic study of contemporary Islam.

This is a furious attack on the idea (associated with Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis) that Islam is at war with the West. The various contributors' counterblasts often seem to assume that their opponents started by wanting to attack Islam and designed their arguments with that intention, but of course they can't prove this. Every chapter has long angry footnotes that seem like continuations of the main text. The West is blamed for "The Hijacking of Arab Jobs by the Western Arms Industry" and this is traced to the Western desire for oil and arms sales. The writers attack the frequently-held view that Muslims in the West do not want to assimilate, but the attack is not persuasive; they hurl counterexamples but the net effect on a reader looking for the truth is confusion. The writer V. S. Naipaul is another large target: "The tone of this rebuke discloses Naipaul's considerable lack of self-awareness, as if his own responses on his Islamic travels were untouched by his fixed preconceptions." [p.159] There is an essay by Tomaz Mastnak which seems to assume that before the Crusades, Europe was untroubled by the expansion of Islam, when in fact the Mediterranean coast suffered frequent Islamic raids. Although I'm not well-informed on all the topics discussed, the frantic tone leads me to suspect something wrong.

Serious readers about Islam and US policy should reflect on most of the essays in this book. It is a necessary antidote to all the simplifications and hidden agendas in the press, policy, and publications by "popular" writers on Islam who so often seem driven by hate, profits, or notoriety. Read here to reconsider the "Huntington Thesis" and its Lewis 'roots'. Reflect on the implications for Bush's "Crusade". The essay on Christian Serb terrorism and the manipulation of hatred is valuable for its general lessons as well. How think tanks and best sellers sway policy among those with

limited depth of knowledge is worth considering -- especially when there seems to be an intellectual "Gresham's Law" of punditry. The continued importance of history and memory is highlighted. A variety of authors with considerable knowledge and depth offer valuable insights into where we are and how we got there - about myths and reality that are central to the what has been dubbed "the war on terror" and is often seen by Muslims with some justification as a "war on Islam" -- a Crusade.

The New Crusades is a timely collection of essays that deals with a dangerous myth - the inherent violence of Islamic civilisation. The editors provide a useful introduction on the ideological shaping of the new Muslim enemy. They point out that the real fundamentalists are those who refuse to see the multiple identities that claim overlapping allegiances in the territorial bounds of the Arab and Muslim world. In support of diversity, the contributors included in the collection are heterogeneous - they range from first-rate scholars and Islamicists like Roy Mottahedeh of Harvard University to well-known journalists like Ahmed Rashid who have written popular accounts of militant Muslim movements. Edward Said is included in this collection, which makes the Post-Orientalist political bent of this volume clear enough (e.g. Bernard Lewis is mostly on the receiving end. but through reasoned argument, it must be said). There is a particularly illuminating essay by Mottahedeh that elegantly dispatches with Huntington's clash of civilisation thesis in the manner of a master historian dealing with a sophomore's essay. Another contributor demolishes the dangerous and bigoted simplifications of Islam contained in the work of V.S. Naipaul. But there are also the sounds of axes grinding in this collection and "ancient hatreds" between feuding academics and rival disciplines in the study of Islam, Muslims and the Arab world. One world sees all of Islam as potentially violent. The other sees potential violence arising from the demonisation of Islam. Indeed, after reading many of the essays, you will come to the depressing conclusion that the crusades of the East of the 11th to 13th century are still very much alive in the 21st century.

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