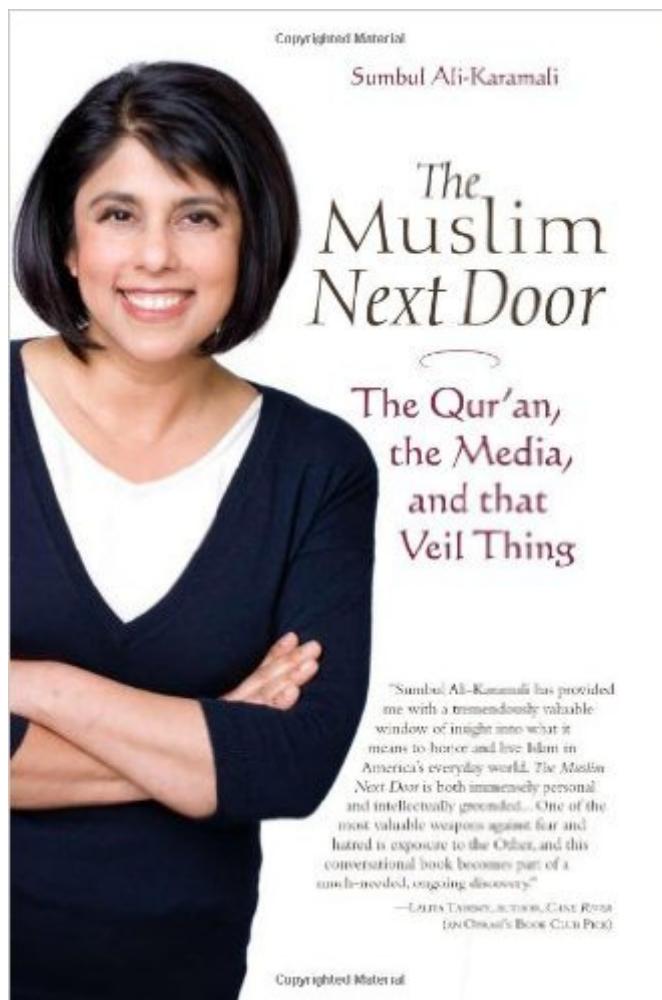


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The Muslim Next Door: The Qur'an, The Media, And That Veil Thing



Synopsis

Bronze Medal Winner of the Independent Publishers Award 2009 Since 9/11, stories about Muslims and the Islamic world have flooded headlines, politics, and water-cooler conversations all across the country. And, although Americans hear about Islam on a daily basis, there remains no clear explanation of Islam or its people. The Muslim Next Door offers easy-to-understand yet academically sound answers to these questions while also dispelling commonly held misconceptions. Written from the point of view of an American Muslim, the book addresses what readers in the Western world are most curious about, beginning with the basics of Islam and how Muslims practice their religion before easing into more complicated issues like jihad, Islamic fundamentalism, and the status of women in Islam. Author Sumbul Ali-Karamali's vivid anecdotes about growing up Muslim and female in the West, along with her sensitive, scholarly overview of Islam, combine for a uniquely insightful look at the world's fastest growing religion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sumbul Ali-Karamali has written a prayer, and modestly called it a book. It is "The Muslim Next Door: The Qur'an, the Media, and that Veil Thing." I don't care who you are or what faith tradition you follow, this book is necessary. I use the word necessary because it's the only one that fits. Really. This book should be required reading in America. Ms. Ali-Karamali has written gently, and respectfully, with humor, and also with an authoritative scholarly voice. I can't remember the last time I carried a book around with me the way I have carried this book. Part of the power of this book for

me has been in the experience of carrying it with me and encountering the interest and puzzlement of other people simply in reaction to the title. Always with the "Why are you reading that?" as a kind of subtext. I have enjoyed carrying the book with me as a social experiment, and as a way to enter into the suggested topics for discussion in the back of the book. This book will stay with me a long time. I read a previous review of the book that said something like it was a quick read. I would say, instead, that this book is very approachable while maintaining its scholarly integrity. It provides citations, easily notated by chapter, an historical chronology, and recommendations for further reading. It should be taught. How lucky would be the students of the author herself. She should tour. Seriously. At the least, this book should be required reading in curricula around the country. I have gone over my copy carefully and have dog eared and post-it marked and highlighted and underscored. I have read the chapters in order and returned to them again. I have sat thinking deeply about the questions for discussion at the end of the book.

Since I live in a very diverse community and work with a number of Muslim professionals, I was quite intrigued by Ms. Ali-Karamali's book. She provides some illuminating documentation about the history of Islam and places it in a proper historical context. Her most compelling argument is her eloquent plea for us to recognize that the overwhelming majority of Muslims are not representative of the small minority within their faith who are violent. In my opinion she is entirely right in her contention. No individual is responsible for the actions of others whom they most likely do not even know. However she tends to gloss over historically relevant points that can undermine her premise. She describes jizya taxes in almost positive terms and never once discusses the dhimmi laws intended to subjugate monotheists of other faiths. While I can understand her reluctance to delve into these issues in great detail, had she done so her book would have earned greater credibility in my eyes. Every faith has strengths and flaws. She appears to fall into the "No True Scotsman" fallacy on a number of occasions. A faith can be arguably defined by the practices of its contemporary majority, regardless of what an ideal interpretation would represent. Islam as well as other faiths (Orthodox Judaism and Amish Mennonite, for example) can be very legalistic. Legalism tends to trend towards some dehumanization. Additionally, she neglected to discuss some extraordinary facts regarding the history of Islam. There's no question that Muslim societies have made incredible and irreplaceable contributions to world culture, science and art. But for the scholars in medieval Muslim societies, Egyptian and Greek science and mathematics might very well have been lost.

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