

To the Syed family,

In the past two years, I have had the pleasure of taking not one, but two classes about Islamic society at UC Davis: MST 20A and HIS 191C, examining the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Ottomans. Although my family is already well-seeped in Islamic and Arab history and culture - my father was an Arabic translator in Egypt during the 80s, bringing back a love for Egyptian culture as well as a newfound fluency, and my mother is a devout Muslim - I was delighted to learn more about the frankly beautiful historical cultures of the Middle East, and in particular, how I could use that knowledge to better the world.

Islamophobic rhetoric usually stems from those who are ignorant about Islam rather than from those who understand it. In third grade, I was told the Quran is a "comic book" by my Anglo-American classmate, who had parroted that from her mother. A few years later, one of the assistants at my school's after-school program told the kids in his reading group, including my sister, that "Islam is a religion of violence." Neither of these two had ever read the Quran or heard Islam's tenets.

Islamophobia often comes from false ideas about the religion itself, not due to critique, rational or inflated, of actual elements of the faith. Islamophobes will say that "[Islam is a fascist ideology](#)" when nationalism, a core and unalienable tenet of fascism, is not present in the teachings of the Quran or any hadiths. They say sharia law [restricts women's rights](#) when sharia gave women the right to own property and to keep their birth name upon marriage back in the 7th century. The Quran called man and woman friend and equal (9:71) when Corinthians 11:8-9 called woman the slave of man. Islam is said to ["stifle \[science and\] human progress"](#) when Abbasid aristocrats sponsored scholars of faith, art, math, science, medicine, poetry, and more twelve hundred years ago, even plotting the Earth's circumference in 830 with relative accuracy. The protester, Jacqui Lambie, and Anonymous clearly have not heard any of these rebuttals.

These claims made by Islamophobes are thus frustratingly wrong, clearly contradicted by Islam's teachings and history. Many, like Abdel-Magpied above, have compared modern hatred of Muslims to Nazi Germany's hatred of Jews, and while there are many parallels, there is at least one difference. Nazi anti-Semitism was drawn from a long European history of hatred of Jews, supposed "Christ-killers," and the desire to find an economic and political scapegoat, while Muslims are mostly condemned for ideological reasons, even if it is not really Muslim ideology. Therefore, education about the teachings of Islam and true Islamic cultures - like the aggressively un-nationalist pre-20th century Ottomans or the caliphate of al-Mansur, not the autocracies of the Taliban or al-Qaeda - has the potential to be used to dispel this hatred. Specific knowledge of Islam and discovery of its deep, rich history of sponsoring academia and upholding equity before even the Magna Carta has given me the tools to counter Islamophobic claims with the truth, and spreading this knowledge of Islam's beauty and peaceful nature. I aim to create easy-to-read infographics to spread across social media platforms like Instagram and Reddit that will dissuade readers from falling into the anti-Islamic pipeline and I aim to participate in my local communities and point to clear, specific counter-information to anti-Islamic rhetoric. If even one person is dissuaded from bigotry, that may be one less person who attempts to shoot up a *jummah* or *Eid*. They might even partake in that *jummah* or *Eid*. As long as they are saved from hate, one cannot be too thankful for the number of lives that have been saved from bullets and that the world is a safer place.

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