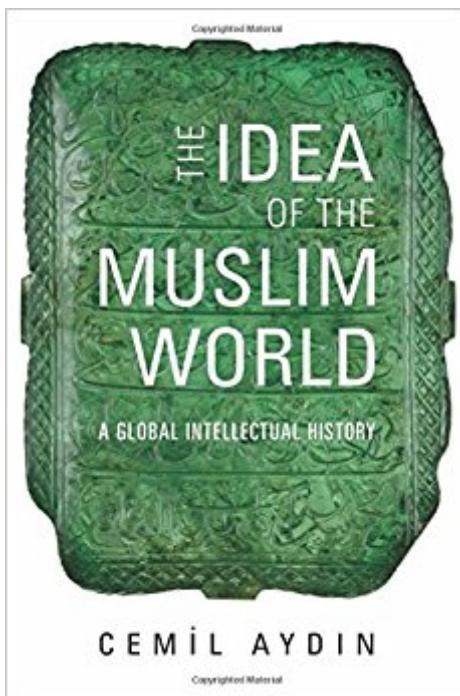


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# The Idea Of The Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History



## Synopsis

When President Barack Obama visited Cairo in 2009 to deliver an address to Muslims worldwide, he followed in the footsteps of countless politicians who have taken the existence of a unified global Muslim community for granted. But as Cemil Aydin explains in this provocative history, it is a misconception to think that the world—some 1.5 billion Muslims constitute a single religio-political entity. How did this belief arise, and why is it so widespread? The Idea of the Muslim World searches for the intellectual origins of a mistaken notion and explains its enduring allure for non-Muslims and Muslims alike. Conceived as the antithesis of Western Christian civilization, the idea of the Muslim world emerged in the late nineteenth century, when European empires ruled the majority of Muslims. It was inflected from the start by theories of white supremacy, but Muslims had a hand in shaping the idea as well. Aydin reveals the role of Muslim intellectuals in envisioning and essentializing an idealized pan-Islamic society that refuted claims of Muslims' racial and civilizational inferiority. After playing a key role in the politics of the Ottoman Caliphate, the idea of the Muslim world survived decolonization and the Cold War, and took on new force in the late twentieth century. Standing at the center of both Islamophobic and pan-Islamic ideologies, the idea of the Muslim world continues to hold the global imagination in a grip that will need to be loosened in order to begin a more fruitful discussion about politics in Muslim societies today.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press (April 24, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674050371

ISBN-13: 978-0674050372

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #95,077 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #69 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > History #72 in Books > History > World > Religious > Islam #148 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Middle Eastern

## Customer Reviews

The Idea of the Muslim World is an original and important book. Aydin provides a global lens for

viewing the ways in which modernity has shaped both Muslims' understandings of their global role, and the ways in which we understand the place of Muslims in the world. (Edmund Burke III, author of *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam*) Aydin captures the formation and evolution of our reference to the Muslim world and how this phrase came to prominence in everyday discourse. In eight superb chapters, he frames the Muslim world, and by implication Islam, as a cultural and civilizational tradition within a defined historical and political framework. A tour de force. (Ebrahim Moosa, author of *What Is a Madrasa?*) In Aydin's telling, the idea of the Muslim world began in response to imperial racism, not to empire itself.

(Yasmine Seale Harper's 2017-05-01) Aydin upends the common view that the West and Islam are unavoidably in conflict in this crisp history of modern Islamic international relations. He argues the notion of a unified, global Muslim community was not present until Western imperialism and racism forced a defensive posture from Muslims. This is a solid work for college classrooms and scholars on the history of global Muslim consciousness and our current world.

(Publishers Weekly 2017-04-03) Thoughtful and provocative, Aydin skillfully recounts the complex web of relationships that existed between and among European Christian and Muslim nations before the 19th century, in which religious affiliation played no predictable role as a unifying, rallying factor. This is a carefully argued book that will provoke specialists and nonspecialists alike to revisit commonly held assumptions about the nature of relations between Islam and the West in the past, present, and future. The author's masterly historical survey drives home the point that, in the past, shared values and interests rather than shared religion typically allowed for the creation of alliances among people from varied backgrounds. Those are exactly the kinds of alliances that need to be forged today. (Asma Afsaruddin Chronicle of Higher Education 2017-05-14) [A] timely book. It is here that Aydin's book proves so valuable: by revealing how the racial, civilizational, and political biases that emerged in the nineteenth century shape contemporary visions of the Muslim world, within and beyond it. (Anver M. Emon and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins Foreign Affairs 2017-07-01)

Cemil Aydin is Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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