

# BEYOND THE STAGE...

*A Supplemental Guide for*

# AMERICAN UNDERGROUND

by Brent Askari

Directed by Julianne Boyd

In the not-so-distant future, an interracial couple enjoys a visit from their college-aged son when a young Muslim woman arrives at their back door. She's looking for safe passage via a new Underground Railroad as Muslims are being detained and imprisoned. Suddenly, a government official knocks on their door, wreaking havoc on the family. They must decide how much to risk to save an innocent woman. This riveting thriller takes us inside a stark vision of an unapologetic America.

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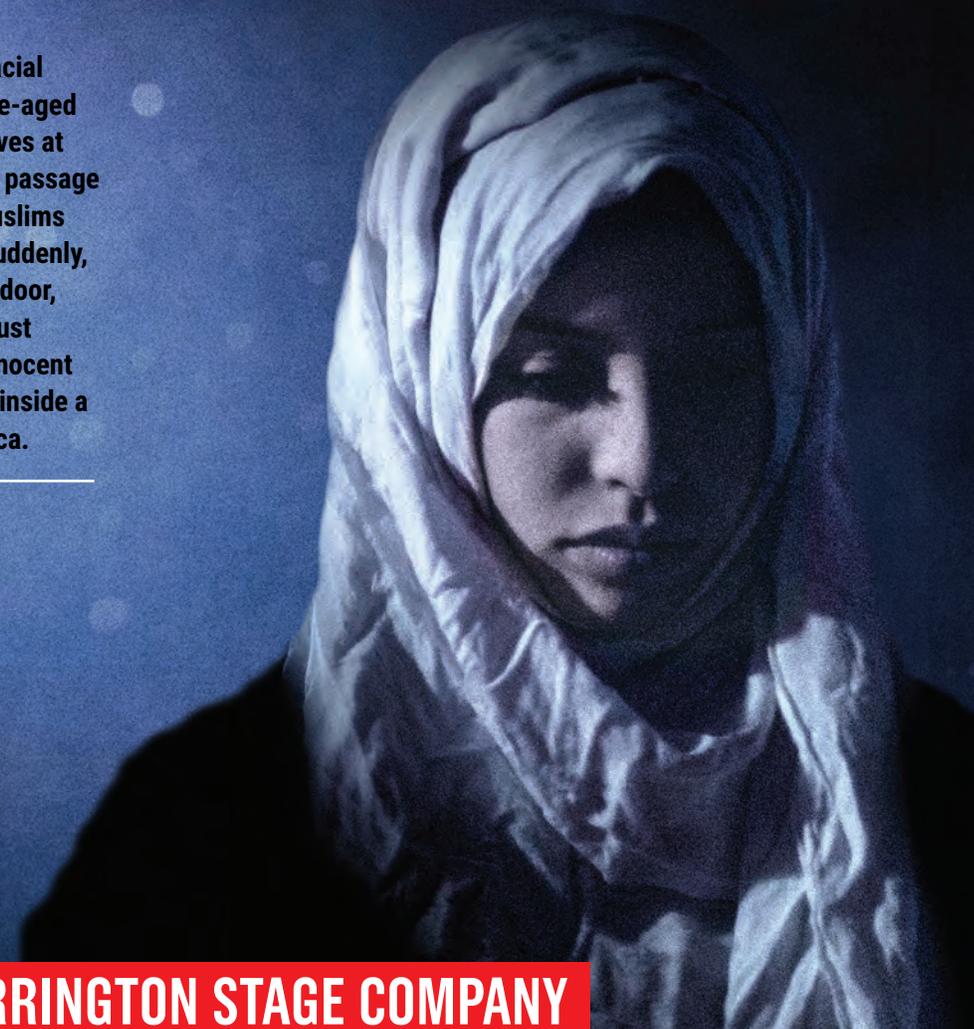
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# An Interview with Playwright Brent Askari

## What inspired you to write this play?

Certain dark trends in our culture were becoming even more mainstream in recent years, particularly in terms of anti-Middle Eastern and Islamophobic sentiment.

I'm half Persian, and so I felt this kind of rhetoric and policy-making on an extremely personal level. I started having nightmarish visions of where this could lead, given precedents both here and in other countries – human history certainly provides no shortage of horrific scenarios concerning the persecutions of various groups. As a creative person, when something gets under my skin or burrows into my psyche, I feel that I have to express it. *American Underground* made it to the page as a kind of fever dream, something that I needed to sweat out and put to paper.

## How do you feel the genre of “thriller” aids in the storytelling?

Well, I would say I'm a fan of genre storytelling, generally speaking. I definitely think genre storytelling gets a bad rap in certain circles, but I don't think there's an inherent dichotomy between telling genre stories and exploring serious themes. After all, the greatest writer in the English language, William Shakespeare, wrote genre plays – whether they were revenge tragedies, pastoral romances or histories.

But to answer your question: I actually don't ultimately know if I'd call *American Underground* a true thriller, but I think it certainly incorporates several thriller elements. And I think that the subject matter inherently lends itself to a certain amount of intrigue, tension and surprise. In the end, it probably just boils down to the fact that I like thrillers!

## What do you hope audiences take away from this story?

I don't know if there's a single point or a message that I hope the audience takes with them out of the theatre. As cliché as it may sound, I hope that the work stimulates some good, vigorous conversations once the play is over. Obviously, the story functions as a kind of cautionary tale, and I hope it gets people thinking about the direction of our culture and our nation.

## What do you feel are the most important steps in dismantling incorrect assumptions about a specific group of people?

That's a huge question! I certainly don't think I have a handle on all the necessary steps, but look – in the end, it's really about empathy, right? It's about putting yourself in other people's shoes. As theatre artists, we trade in empathy – whether as actors, writers, directors, designers, whatever – we're constantly connecting with other people's feelings and experiences. And I think that's one of the reasons we all come to the theatre – to witness and experience the stories of other people in a communal setting. And in general, the skills and pleasures we experience in theatre – whether as artists or audience members – have some correlation to our responsibilities as citizens. In my opinion, without empathy the whole thing falls apart...in a theatre, a community or a nation.



**“...without empathy, the whole thing falls apart... in a theatre, a community or a nation.”**

**“*American Underground* made it to the page as a kind of fever dream, something that I needed to sweat out and put to paper.”**

# Director's Notes

*American Underground* takes place in the not-so-distant future when Muslims are being rounded up and persecuted. As the play begins, parents are preparing dinner for their son, who has recently returned from college on a holiday break. That's the last normal action you will see in this play as the family's world is turned upside down when they try to give safe passage to an innocent Muslim woman seeking protection.

Throughout history, people in power have persecuted ethnic or religious minorities because they felt threatened by people with different looks or beliefs. It is my hope that the fictional and futuristic world in *American Underground* will help us begin discussions about what we can all do to change the climate of distrust that we live in. If we strive to create a world where all people are treated humanely and with respect, then this play's portentous events will not become our reality.

## **Julianne Boyd**

DIRECTOR, *AMERICAN UNDERGROUND*

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, BARRINGTON STAGE COMPANY

**“When I remember my family’s time in the American Underground, I realize: it wasn’t only us that was underground. I actually think America itself went underground then.”** —Jeff, *American Underground*

# What is Islam? A Brief Overview

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity, with about 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. Although its roots go back further, scholars typically date the creation of Islam to the seventh century, making it the youngest of the major world religions. Islam started in Mecca, in modern-day Saudi Arabia, during the time of the prophet Muhammad's life. Today, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world and experts predict it will surpass Christianity as the largest religion by the end of the century.

## MUHAMMAD

Muhammad, sometimes spelled "Mohammed," was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 A.D. Muslims believe he was the final prophet sent by God to reveal their faith to mankind. According to Islamic texts and tradition, the angel Gabriel visited Muhammad in 610 A.D. while he was meditating in a cave. The angel ordered Muhammad to recite the words of Allah. Muslims believe that Muhammad continued to receive revelations from Allah throughout the rest of his life.

Starting in about 613 A.D., Muhammad began preaching the messages he received throughout Mecca. He taught that there was no other God but Allah and that Muslims should devote their lives to this God.



Calligraphic representation of the name of Abu Bakr

## ABU BAKR

After Muhammad's passing, Islam began to spread rapidly. A series of leaders, known as caliphs, became successors to Muhammad. This system of leadership, which was run by a Muslim ruler, became known as a caliphate. The first caliph was Abu Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law and close friend.

Abu Bakr died about two years after he was elected and was succeeded in 634 A.D. by Caliph

Umar, another father-in-law of Muhammad.

## CALIPHATE SYSTEM

When Umar was assassinated six years after being named caliph, Uthman, Muhammad's son-in-law, became Caliph. Uthman was also killed, and Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, was selected as the next caliph. During the reign of the first four caliphs, Arab Muslims conquered large regions in the Middle East, including Syria, Palestine, Iran and Iraq. Islam also spread throughout areas in Europe, Africa and Asia.

The caliphate system lasted for centuries and eventually evolved into the Ottoman Empire, which controlled large regions in the Middle East from about 1517 until 1917, when World War I ended the Ottoman reign.

## ISLAM FACTS

- The word "Islam" means "to submit or surrender."
- Followers of Islam are called Muslims.
- Islam is monotheistic religion that worships Allah/God.
- Followers of Islam aim to live a life of complete submission to Allah. They believe that nothing can happen without Allah's permission, but humans have free will.
- Islam teaches that Allah's word was revealed to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel.
- Muslims believe several prophets were sent to teach Allah's law. They respect the same prophets as Jews and Christians, including Abraham, Moses, Noah and Jesus, with Muhammad being the final prophet.
- Mosques are Islamic houses of worship.
- Some important Islamic holy places include the Kaaba shrine in Mecca, the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, and the Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina.
- The Quran is the holy text of Islam.
- Followers of Islam believe in life after death and that there will be a day of judgment when Jesus Christ descends from the heavens.
- While the word "jihad" is being used negatively in the media, it in fact refers to Muslims' internal and external struggle to live out their faith as well as possible.

## Islam: A Brief Overview *continued*

### SUNNIS AND SHIITES

When Muhammad died, there was debate over who should replace him as leader. This led to a schism in Islam, and two major sects emerged: the Sunnis and the Shiites.

Sunnis make up nearly 90% of Muslims worldwide. They accept that the first four caliphs were the true successors to Muhammad. Shiite Muslims believe that only the caliph Ali and his descendants are the real successors to Muhammad. They deny the legitimacy of the first three caliphs. Today, Shiite Muslims have a considerable presence in Iran, Iraq and Syria.



### THE QURAN

The Quran (sometimes spelled Qur'an or Koran) is holy book among Muslims.

It contains information that is found in the Torah, as well as revelations that were given to Muhammad. The text is the sacred word of God and supersedes any previous writings. Muhammad himself was never taught to read or write, so his scribes wrote down his words, which became the Quran. The book is written with Allah as the first person, speaking through Gabriel to Muhammad. It contains 114 chapters, which are called surahs.

Scholars believe the Quran was compiled shortly after Muhammad's death, under the guidance of Caliph Abu Bakr.

### FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM



Muslims follow five pillars that are essential to their faith. These include:

- **Shahada:** to declare one's faith in God and belief in Muhammad
- **Salat:** to pray five times a day (at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening)
- **Zakat:** to give to those in need
- **Sawm:** to fast during Ramadan
- **Hajj:** to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a person's lifetime if the person is able

### MUSLIM HOLIDAYS

The two major Muslim holidays are:

**Eid al Adha:** celebrates the Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son for Allah

**Eid al-Fitr:** marks the end of Ramadan – the Islamic holy month of fasting

Muslims also celebrate other holidays, such as the Islamic New Year and the birth of Muhammad.

*continued*

## MUSLIM CUSTOMS AND DRESS

The *Hijab* is one of the hottest topics in Islam. *Hijab* is the principle of modesty and includes behaviour, as well as dress, for both males and females.

Wearing the *hijab* is a very personal choice for Muslim women, and few people understand its meaning or complexity. The Quran makes a few references to Muslim clothing, but prefers to point out more general principles of modest dress.

### Here's a Guide to the Various Different Types of Headscarves Worn by Women:

The word **hijab** describes the act of covering up generally but is often used to describe the headscarves worn by Muslim women. These scarves come in many styles and colours. The type most commonly worn in the West covers the head and neck but leaves the face clear.

The **niqab** is a veil for the face that leaves the area around the eyes clear. However, it may be worn with a separate eye veil. It is worn with an accompanying headscarf.

The **burka** is the most concealing of all Islamic veils. It is a one-piece veil that covers the face and body, often leaving just a mesh screen to see through.

The **al-amira** is a two-piece veil. It consists of a close fitting cap, usually made from cotton or polyester, and a tube-like scarf.

The **shayla** is a long, rectangular scarf popular in the Gulf region. It is wrapped around the head and tucked or pinned in place at the shoulders.

The **khimar** is a long, cape-like veil that hangs down to just above the waist. It covers the hair, neck and shoulders completely, but leaves the face clear.

The **chador**, worn by many Iranian women when outside the house, is a full-body cloak. It is often accompanied by a smaller headscarf underneath.

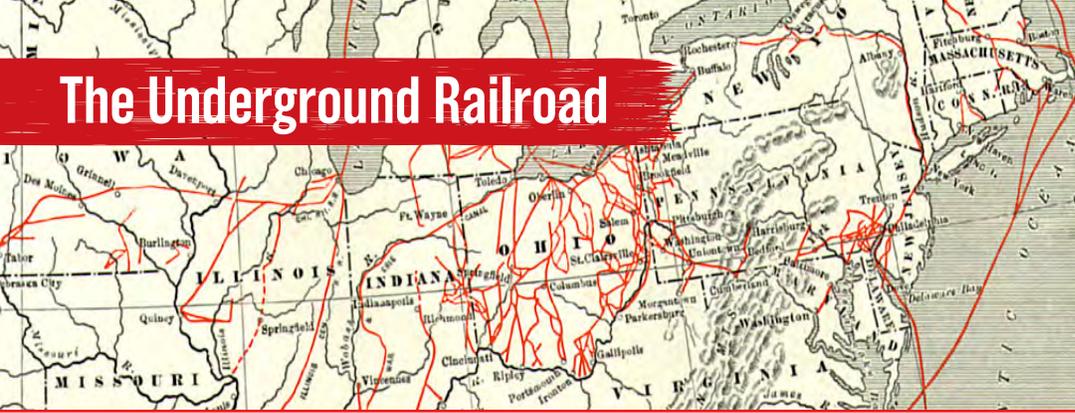
## ISLAM TODAY

In recent years, Islam's supposed association with terrorism has sparked political debate in many countries. The controversial term "radical Islam," which was created by American media, has become a well-known label to describe the religion's connection to acts of violence but is incorrectly associated with Islam.

Muslims have overwhelmingly negative views of terrorist groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda and Boko Haram, which do not represent Islam. All religions have extreme sects that do not reflect the core values of the religion, however these misrepresentations have disproportionately affected Muslim communities.



# The Underground Railroad



The Underground Railroad, a vast network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to the North and to Canada, was not run by any single organization or person. Rather, it consisted of many individuals – some white but predominantly black – who knew only of the local efforts to aid fugitives and not of the overall operation. Still, it effectively moved hundreds of slaves northward each year. According to one estimate, 100,000 slaves left the South between 1810 and 1850.

An organized system to assist runaway slaves seems to have begun towards the end of the 18th century. In 1786 George Washington complained about how one of his runaway slaves was helped by a “society of Quakers, formed for such purposes.” The system grew, and around 1831 it was dubbed “The Underground Railroad,” after the then-emerging steam railroads. The system even used terms used in railroading: the homes and businesses where fugitives would rest and eat were called “stations” and “depots” and were run by “stationmasters,” those who contributed money or goods were “stockholders,” and the “conductor” was responsible for moving fugitives from one station to the next.

For the fleeing slave, running away to the North was anything but easy. The first step was to escape from the slaveholder. For many, this meant relying on his or her own resources. Sometimes a “conductor,” posing as a slave, would enter a plantation and then guide the runaways northward. The fugitives would move at night. They would generally travel between 10 and 20 miles to the next station, where they would rest and eat, hiding in barns and other out-of-the-way places. While they waited, a message would be sent to the next station to alert its stationmaster.

The escapees would also travel by train and boat – conveyances that sometimes had to be paid for. Money was also needed to improve the appearance of the runaways – a black man, woman, or child in tattered clothes would invariably attract suspicious eyes. This money was donated by individuals and also raised by various groups, including vigilance committees.

Vigilance committees sprang up in the larger towns and cities of the North, most prominently in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. In addition to soliciting money, the organizations provided food, lodging and money, and helped the fugitives settle into a community by helping them find jobs and providing letters of recommendation.

The Underground Railroad had many notable participants, including John Fairfield in Ohio, the son of a slaveholding family, who made many daring rescues, Levi Coffin, a Quaker who assisted more than 3,000 slaves, and Harriet Tubman, who made 19 trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom.

## Harriet Tubman



**“I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say; I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”**

Born into slavery in Maryland, Harriet Tubman escaped to freedom in the North in 1849 to become the most famous “conductor” on the Underground Railroad. Tubman risked her life to lead hundreds of family members and other slaves from the plantation system to freedom in the elaborate secret network of safe houses.

In a decade she guided over 300 slaves to freedom; abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison thought she deserved the nickname “Moses.”

During the Civil War, Tubman served as a nurse, cook, laundress, spy and scout. After the Emancipation Proclamation, she returned to Auburn, NY, and continued to help those in need. With donations and the proceeds from her vegetable garden, she raised money to open schools for African-Americans and gave speeches on Women’s Rights. Her dream to build a home for the elderly was realized in 1908, when the Harriet Tubman Home for the Elderly was inaugurated.

Sources: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html> • [www.harriet-tubman.org/short-biography/](http://www.harriet-tubman.org/short-biography/) • [www.brainyquote.com/quotes/harriet\\_tubman\\_401831](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/harriet_tubman_401831) • <http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/CWPics/86139.jpg> • Photo of Harriet Tubman: Unknown photographer, from Tabby Studios in Auburn, NY.

# American Persecution: Repeating History

America has a long and sordid history with persecution based on religious beliefs, race and ethnicity. Below are some examples of how the US Government has used 'camps' to control certain groups of people.



circa 1844: Andrew Jackson (1767 - 1845), 7th President of the United States of America. (Photo by Library Of Congress/Getty Images)

**President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law in 1830.**

**The man Donald Trump has called his favorite president referred to Native Americans in his 1833 State of the Union address as: "Established in the midst of a...superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority... they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and long disappear..."**

## THE TRAIL OF TEARS

Half a century before President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law in 1830, a young Virginia governor named Thomas Jefferson embraced genocide and ethnic cleansing as solutions to what would later be called the "Indian problem." In 1780, Jefferson wrote that "if we are to wage a campaign against these

Indians, the end proposed should be their extermination, or their removal beyond the lakes of the Illinois River." However, it wasn't until Jackson that "emigration depots" were introduced as an integral part of official US Indian removal policy. Tens of thousands of Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Ponca, Winnebago and other indigenous peoples were forced from their homes at gunpoint and marched to prison camps in Alabama and Tennessee. Overcrowding and a lack of sanitation led to outbreaks of measles, cholera, whooping cough, dysentery and typhus, while insufficient food and water, along with exposure to the elements, caused tremendous death and suffering.

Thousands of men, women and children died of cold, hunger and illness in camps and during death marches, including the infamous Trail of Tears, that spanned hundreds and sometimes even a thousand miles. This genocidal relocation was pursued, Jackson explained, as the "benevolent policy" of the US government, and because Native Americans "have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits nor the desire of improvement" required to live in peace and freedom. "Established in the midst of a...superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority...they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and long disappear," the man who Donald Trump has called his favorite president, said in his 1833 State of the Union address.

## THE LONG WALK OF THE NAVAJO

Decades later, when the Sioux and other indigenous people resisted white invasion and theft of their lands, Minnesota governor Alexander Ramsey responded with yet another call for genocide and ethnic cleansing. "The Sioux Indians of Minnesota must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of the state," he declared in 1862, offering a bounty of \$200 – over \$5,000 in today's money – for the scalp of each fleeing or resisting Indian. Around 1,700 Dakota women, children and elderly were force-marched into a concentration camp built on a sacred spiritual site. Many didn't make it there. According to Mendota Dakota Tribal Chair Jim Anderson, "during that march a lot of our relatives died. They were killed by settlers; when they went through the small towns, babies were taken out of mothers' arms and killed and women...were shot or bayoneted." Those who survived faced winter storms, diseases and hunger. Many did not make it through the winter.

Two years later, Civil War general and notorious Indian killer James Henry Carleton forced 10,000 Navajo people to march 300 miles (480 km) in the dead of winter from their homeland in the Four Corners region to a concentration camp at Fort Sumner, New Mexico. This followed a scorched earth



"The Trail of Tears" by Max. D. Standley

## American Persecution: Repeating History *continued*

campaign, in which famed frontiersman Kit Carson tried to starve the life out of the Navajo, hundreds of whom died or were enslaved by white settlers and rival tribes during what became known as The Long Walk.

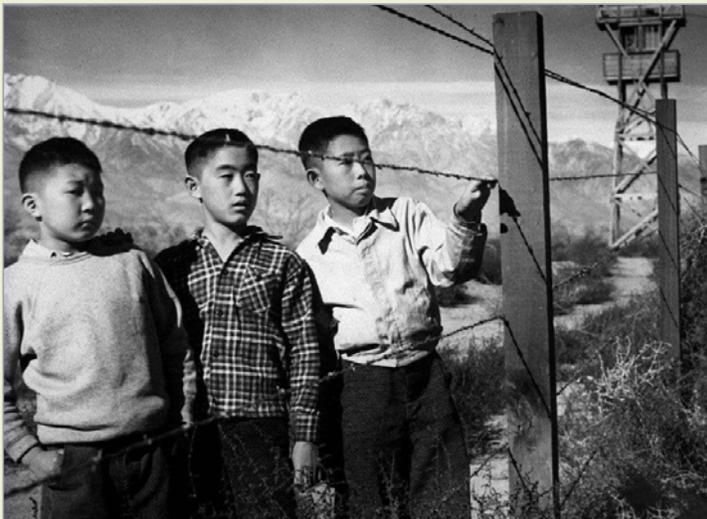
### CONTRABAND CAMPS

At about the same time, the Union Army was re-capturing freed slaves throughout the South and pressing them into hard labor in disease-ridden “contraband camps,” since escaped and freed slaves were considered captured enemy property. “There is much sickness, suffering and destitution,” wrote James E. Yeatman of the Western Sanitary Commission after visiting one such camp near Natchez, Mississippi in 1863. “There was not one house that I visited where death had not entered...seventy-five had died in a single day...some had returned to their masters on account of their suffering.” At one camp in Young’s Point, Louisiana, Yeatman reported “frightful sickness and death,” with 30-50 people dying each day from disease and starvation. One camp near Natchez, Mississippi held as many as 4,000 black refugees in the summer of 1863; by fall 2,000 had already perished, most of them children infected with smallpox and measles.



CONTRABAND CAMP. PHOTO BY JAMES F. GIBSON.

### CONCENTRATION CAMPS FOR US CITIZENS



Children at the Manzanar internment camp in California in 1943; photo by Toyo Miyatake. (National Park Service/AP)

conditions were much better than they had been in previous US camps. Japanese-Americans weren’t so lucky. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, under which all people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast were rounded up and imprisoned in dozens of civilian assembly centers (where they were often forced to sleep in crowded, manure-covered horse stables), relocation centers, military bases and “citizen isolation centers” – harsh desert prison camps where “problem inmates,” including those who refused to pledge allegiance to the United States, were jailed. Internment would last the duration of the war, sometimes longer, with many detainees discovering their homes, businesses and property were stolen or destroyed when they were finally released.

During both World Wars, thousands of German nationals, German-Americans, Germans from Latin American nations and Italians were imprisoned in concentration camps across the United States. However, their race and relatively high level of assimilation saved most German-Americans from internment, and



Author/actor/activist George Takei.  
Photo Credit: TOPSHELF PRODUCTIONS.

**Actor George Takei was interned with his family for the duration of the war. “I know what concentration camps are,” he Tweeted amid the current controversy. “I was inside two of them. In America. And yes, we are operating such camps again.”**

## American Persecution: Repeating History *continued*

President Ronald Reagan would formally apologize and sign off on \$20,000 reparation payments to former internees in 1988.

During the early years of the Cold War, Congress passed the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950 over President Harry Truman's veto, which led to the construction of six concentration camps that were meant to hold communists, peace activists, civil rights leaders and others deemed a threat in the event the government declared a state of emergency. The camps, which were never used, were closed by the end of the decade.

### WAR ON 'TERRORISTS' AND MIGRANTS

Although prisoner-of-war camps are not included in this survey of US concentration camps, the open-ended global war against terrorism started by the George W. Bush administration after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States has seen a blurring of lines between combatant and civilian detention. According to Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, former Chief of Staff for Bush-era Secretary of State Colin Powell, most of the men and boys held at the Guantánamo Bay military prison were innocent but held for political reasons or in an attempt to glean a "mosaic" of intelligence. Many detainees were tortured and died in US custody.

Many people think that concentration camps are in operation on US soil once again with the establishment of border camps. The Trump administration's attempt to portray child imprisonment as something much happier instantly recalls World War II propaganda films showing content Japanese-Americans benefiting from life behind barbed wire. Actor George Takei, who was interned with his family for the duration of the war, was anything but content. "I know what concentration camps are," he Tweeted amid the current controversy. "I was inside two of them. In America. And yes, we are operating such camps again."

**"This week, the Department of Health and Human Services announced that it would handle the influx of unaccompanied minors by housing some of them at Fort Sill, an Army base in Oklahoma that held detainees of Japanese descent during World War II..."**

"How the Trump Administration's Border Camps Fit into the History of Concentration Camps"  
By Andrea Pitzer, GQ, June 18, 2019.



Photo by Sergio Flores for *The Washington Post*/Getty Images

## Religious Persecution



Religious persecution is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group of individuals as a response to their religious beliefs, affiliations or lack thereof. The tendency of societies or groups to alienate or repress different subcultures is a recurrent theme in human history.

BELOW ARE ONLY A FEW EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION THROUGHOUT HISTORY:

- Persecution of the Jewish and Muslim people for 'heresy' during the Spanish Inquisition.
- Christians treated poorly by the Roman Empire for believing in what Rome called a 'superstitious' religion. They were commonly fed to lions at the Colosseum.
- Religious persecution of Jewish and Muslim people during the Crusades.
- Religious persecution during the European Reformation of those who went against the Catholic Church by forming new religions, such as Calvinism.
- Religious persecution in Europe causing pilgrims to leave and establish the American colonies.
- The Holocaust in Germany during World War II, when millions of Jewish people were confined to restricted housing areas (ghettos) and then murdered in concentration camps.

Religious and Ethnic persecution often overlap, as some races and ethnicities are more likely to follow a certain religion. In Judaism, for example, to be Jewish is both an ethnic heritage and an active religion. Some people may identify with the ethnicity but not the religion and vice versa. In Islam, people are often misjudged based on country of origin or race and grouped into a religious affiliation.

# Current Events: How They Relate to *American Underground*

## China Said It Closed Muslim Detention Camps. There's Reason to Doubt That.

By Chris Buckley and Steven Lee Myers  
Excerpted from *The New York Times*, AUG. 9, 2019

HOTAN, China – The muscular young Uighur man sat uncomfortably, glancing occasionally at three Chinese officials in the room, as he described his state-mandated salvation in a re-education camp.

The man, Abduweili Kebayir, 25, explained how watching Islamic videos on his phone landed him in one of China's notorious indoctrination camps for Muslims for eight months – and how he emerged in January as a reformed man.

“Now I know the error of my ways,” he said, as his wife and daughter shuffled nervously around the living room. The room, like the rest of the eerily sparse house where officials who arranged the meeting said he lived, seemed almost staged, decorated with a family portrait, a potted plastic plant and a wall clock that had stopped.

His words at times sounded as rigidly scripted as the government's propaganda. “Now I know what is right and wrong, and what is legal and illegal,” he said.

In late July, the government said most detainees had been released from the indoctrination camps built to eliminate what it described as the threat of Islamic radicalism and antigovernment sentiment among the overwhelmingly Muslim population of Uighurs in the Xinjiang region in China's northwest. But reporters from *The New York Times* found, over seven days of traveling through the region, that the vast network of detention camps erected by the government of China's authoritarian leader, Xi Jinping, continues to operate, and even expand.

These camps, large and small, remain swaddled in heavy security and secrecy, despite the Chinese government's new pledge of transparency. There are five major ones around Hotan, a city in southern Xinjiang, including the one where Mr. Kebayir said he was detained.

Since last year, evidence has also pointed to a system of forced labor linked to the camps. Factories being built nearby provide a place to transfer detainees whom officials consider sufficiently “reformed,” like Mr. Kebayir now, while keeping them under government supervision. Critics say this is simply another form of subjugation.



Abduweili Kebayir with his wife and daughter. Photo Gilles Sabrie for *The New York Times*.

**“Now I know the error of my ways,” he said, as Chinese officials watched.**

The camps have already swallowed up one million Muslims or more, by most estimates, wrenching them from their families and homes and subjecting them to what activists, relatives of detainees and former detainees describe as stressful, even debilitating, indoctrination. Detainees, they say, are forced to renounce their religious beliefs and embrace the ideology of the Communist Party.

The center offered a model of how the Chinese government describes the indoctrination camps – a kind of boarding school and training center that turns local residents into loyal citizens. Former detainees have disputed this description of these centers, saying that life inside the camps is far harsher and that inmates included professionals and officials who were not in need of job training.

*continued*



The entrance to the re-education camp at Harmony New Village. Photo: Gilles Sabrie for *The New York Times*.

By his account, Mr. Kebayir was now earning a decent wage — 2,100 renminbi last month, about \$300 — stitching soles onto leather shoes at one of the new factories. Before he entered the camp, he said, he struggled as a poorly educated farmer, growing corn and walnuts, for which Hotan is famous. He paused awkwardly when pressed about details of his re-education. He said most of the others there were young men from the countryside, but he did not know any of them personally.

It was not even clear that the house where Mr. Kebayir was interviewed was actually his. The closet held nothing except for a few dresses, and the refrigerator was empty except for a plate of uncooked dough. There were no toys around for their toddler. Only hours later, Mr. Kebayir and his wife and daughter were no longer at the house and could not be reached, not even through the officials who set up the interview. One of them said Mr. Kebayir had business to deal with and had turned off his phone.

### A Crime by Any Name

By Adam Serwer

Excerpted from *The Atlantic*, JUL 3, 2019

The Trump administration's commitment to deterring immigration through cruelty has made horrifying conditions in detention facilities inevitable.

The horrors detailed in the press were hard to believe.

Detainees described overcrowding so severe that "it was difficult to move in any direction without jostling and being jostled." The water provided them was foul, "of a dark color, and an ordinary glass would collect a thick sediment." The "authorities never removed any filth." A detainee wrote that the "only shelter from the sun and rain and night dews, was what we could make by stretching over us our coats or scraps of blanket." As for the food, "Our ration was in quality a starving one, it being either too foul to be touched or too raw to be digested."

Concentration camps antedate the Holocaust by many decades, having been used by the Spanish in Cuba, the British in South Africa, and both sides in World War I. Pitzer identified concentration camps, in short, as "places of forced relocation of civilians into detention on the basis of group identity." They are often created as a kind of collective punishment, although she noted, "Rarely have governments publicly acknowledged the use of camps as deliberate punishment." Detainees, she wrote, are "typically held because of their racial, cultural, religious, or political identity, not because of any prosecutable offense—though some states have remedied this flaw by making legal existence next to impossible."

**"The argument over whether or not these facilities amount to concentration camps is almost beside the point. The semantic dispute obscures the true conflict, over whether the Trump administration's treatment of migrants amounts to a historic crime, whether future generations will wonder how those involved could possibly have gone along with it, whether there will one day be memorials erected to commemorate it, whether historians write solemn books about it, whether those looking back will vow never to repeat it."**

"Nearly every nation has used camps at some point, though the degree to which their populations have embraced them and the devastation wreaked by each camp system have varied wildly," Pitzer wrote. "Their worst effects tend to be dampened in freer societies, where legal systems and legislatures have an opportunity to act. Yet a relatively healthy democracy is just as capable of instituting camps as the most corrupt Communist society or military dictatorship, sometimes with horrific results."

Americans have again recoiled in shock and horror over the past few weeks as observers who visited immigration detention facilities in the Southwest reported that children were being held in cruelly austere conditions. These observers told the press that the children at a facility in Clint, Texas, were sleeping on concrete floors and being denied soap and toothpaste. They described "children as young as 7 and 8, many of them wearing clothes caked with snot and tears ... caring for infants they've just met." A visiting doctor called the detention centers "torture facilities." At least seven children have died in U.S. custody in the past year, compared with none in the 10 years prior. More than 11,000\* children are now being held by the U.S. government on any given day. As if these conditions were insufficiently punitive, the administration has canceled recreational activities, an act that, like the conditions themselves, likely violates the law.

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## Current Events: How They Relate to *American Underground* continued

### Education Dept. Cites Disproportionate Focus on 'Positive Aspects of Islam' In Reviewing UNC-Duke Grant Funding

By Justine Coleman

Excerpted from *The Hill*, SEPT 19, 2019

The Trump administration is pressuring the University of North Carolina and Duke University to revise their joint Middle East studies program or risk federal funding.

The Education Department wrote in an Aug. 29 letter to the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies that the program disproportionately portrays "the positive aspects of Islam." The agency requested they amend the program by Sept. 22 or lose a grant they've been receiving for almost a decade, The Associated Press reported.

The National Resource Center provides grants to programs that support foreign language learning.

The Education Department said in its letter that foreign language and national security have "taken a back seat to other priorities" that have "little or no relevance" to the objectives of the grant.

The Education Department wrote that the program places "a considerable emphasis" on the "understanding the positive aspects of Islam, while there is an absolute absence of any similar focus on the positive aspects of Christianity, Judaism or any other religion or belief system in the Middle East."

The program has until Sept. 22 to send a "revised schedule of activities" and describe how each relates to foreign language and national security, the department said in its letter.

The Education Department on Thursday said the review is focusing on compliance.

"It is patently false that the Department is reviewing the program as being too positive on Islam," a department spokesperson said in a statement to The Hill. "We're reviewing

UNC-Duke's use of grant funds because we are concerned that they have not followed congressional requirements for the program – that students must learn a foreign language and hear diverse regional perspectives."

"Our inquiry has nothing to do with their program having an Islamic bias," the spokesperson added. "Pro-Islamic programming isn't the concern – it's the lack of diversity and foreign language learning."

A spokesperson said in a statement that "the Consortium deeply values its partnership with the Department of Education and has always been strongly committed to complying with the purposes and requirements of the Title VI program."

"In keeping with the spirit of this partnership, the Consortium is committed to working with the Department to provide more information about its programs," the spokesperson said.

Duke declined to comment.

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos's investigation into the consortium began after Rep. George Holding (R-N.C.) sent her a letter condemning the program for holding a conference with "severe anti-Israel bias and anti-Semitic rhetoric."

DeVos said she was "troubled" by the letter and would look into the consortium, The Associated Press reported.

Holding told the AP that the Education Department has a right to ensure funding is being used properly.

"This has fallen through the cracks, and this could be going on at other educational institutions," he said. "If the department's providing the money and giving guidance on how the money is to be used, I think they can be as in the weeds as they need to be."

The consortium enrolls 960 students in Middle East language courses out of 6,791 students in the overall Middle East studies program, the letter said.

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