Lecture by Professor Omid Safi, Duke University: *America and Islam:  Peace and Justice in an Age of ISIS and Islamophobia.* April 4, 2016.

In this thought-provoking and often shocking lecture, Safi highlighted the role of US foreign policy in creating anti-American sentiments in the Middle East and how this in turn has resulted in high levels of Islamophobia in the United States. Safi was open about his political views and biases and while obviously highly critical of US actions in the Middle East as well as America’s militarism in general he, nevertheless, presented a narrative of historical and current events that I believe is all too often censored. Speaking truth to power was certainly a theme of this lecture and much of what was discussed is no doubt jarring and uncomfortable for most Americans, but necessary to open up for debate.

Although I found the lecture one-sided and I did not agree with the entire story as presented,[[1]](#footnote-1) I feel it was important to underscore America’s mistakes and misguided actions in the Middle East. Such criticisms, I believe, are often viewed as un-American and un-patriotic. I think this is unfortunate in a democracy. The overall message of America’s realpolitik as highly damaging did resonate with me and I think this is a very important issue that Americans must take a closer look at.

In terms of how this all fits into college life, for me at least, it is obvious that such discussions are important if we are to avoid our own, even subconscious, prejudices against Muslim students or students from the Middle East. For certain, what Safi presented was not the mainstream American view and, in fact, is probably closer to how many Muslims understand the conflict and current crisis in the region. Recognizing other perspectives and questioning our own was, I am guessing, at least one of Safi’s goals.

1. Safi was right to criticize America’s support for dictatorial regimes in the Middle East, but I felt he ignored the problem of the Islamic Brotherhood and how, although democratically elected, soon demonstrated un-democratic principles and intolerance when in power, which was part of the motivation for the coup that reinstated the military government in Egypt. This speaks to a larger problem of Islam and democracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)