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The Trump White House Wants You To Fear Muslims: Don't Be Fooled

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The Trump White House wants you to fear Muslims. President Trump, like all autocrats, is a fear monger who knows that when people are afraid they can be more easily manipulated. Playing on people's fears candidate Trump on December 17, 2015 infamously called for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on." Despite his cynical denials that his recent executive order is not a "Muslim ban" that statement is still up on his website. On that same website Trump warns us that Muslims hate "us" Trump argues that "it is obvious to anybody the hatred is beyond comprehension."

As a Muslim American I take this accusation personally. Trump wants my fellow Americans to fear me, my family, and all of my Muslim friends and co-workers. He wants Americans to fear the entire Muslim world including men, women and children; refugees and asylum seekers; scientists and researchers; students and artists. Trump has surrounded himself with advisers who share his fearful vision—Kelly Anne Conway, who recently tried to justify the Muslim ban with reference to a non-existent "Bowling Green Massacre;" right-wing provocateur Steve Bannon who once pitched a paranoid film project about a Muslim takeover of the United States; General Michael Flynn, who has called Islam a "cancer" and a "political ideology" that hides behind "the notion of being a religion." It is not an insult to call Trump a fear monger. It is a sad statement of fact.

Of course, Trump is simply wrong. He is both wrong about the facts and morally wrong for seeking to ban the entry of Muslims into the United States. Yes, there are Muslims terrorists in the world and it is wise to be vigilant in the face of the real threat they pose. But, according to a risk analysis published by the Cato Institute, the actual chances of being killed by a terrorist in the United States is 1 in 3.6 million and by a Muslim refugee a staggering 1 in 3.64 billion. Does this level of threat justify a Muslim ban? In reality, the chances of you having your life saved by an immigrant Muslim cardiologist are immensely greater than losing your life to a Muslim terrorist. In fact, how many lives might be saved by admitting Muslim scientists searching for the cures for cancer and Alzheimers to work at our research universities? How much American

good will is squandered by turning away sick children coming here for life saving treatment? Or refugees fleeing war?

Let's be honest. Islamophobia—fearing Islam and Muslims—is simply irrational. It is every bit as irrational as anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia, and racism. Islam is a complex world religion. As such it is by its very nature multi-valent and diverse. It is not a club, or a secret society or even a political party with strict beliefs and practices about which all of its adherents agree. As a result, knowing that someone is a Muslim tells you almost nothing about his or her politics, personality or even theology. Some of us believe God the Creator is eternally and irrevocably separate from creation. Others, drawing on the Sufi tradition, believe that God and Creation are bound together in a mysterious unity rooted in divine love. Some of us are socially conservative and have clear cut notions of what constitutes proper and improper gender relations. Others are deeply supportive of flexibility and equality when it comes to issues of gender and sexuality. There are many among us who are strong supporters of LGBTQ rights. Some of us display visible symbols of our Muslim identity like a specific style of beard or head scarf. There are others among us who believe that such outward symbols are unimportant. Some of us tend to be scrupulous about outward manifestations of piety like ritual prayer and fasting. Others are less focused on these practices or belong to minority religious communities that have substituted their own vernacular forms of worship. There are some of us who believe that religion and the state should be connected and reinforce each other. Many more of us would prefer to live in a secular democracy that will protect our rights to individual choice in matters of religion. Most of us are tolerant of religious diversity both within the Muslim community and more generally. Admittedly there is a minority of Muslims who adhere to some form of intolerant exclusivism and are convinced that they follow the only true manifestation of the faith. And an even tinier minority who believes that they should engage in violence to achieve their goals. The point is we Muslims are not the Borg. We do not all think or act in the same way. And for this reason blanket exclusion of people on the basis of their Muslim identity does nothing to identify potential terrorists or keep us safe. It is simply an irrational manifestation of fear.

As a Muslim and an American I see no problem in the reasonable vetting of potential immigrants to keep out the violent exclusivists. But given the diversity within Islam, banning all Muslims from a particular country or region does nothing to effectively vet potential immigrants or visitors. All it does is tar an entire diverse religion with an exceedingly broad brush and send a message that America doesn't want Muslims here. Unfortunately I think it is clear that Mr. Trump would be very happy if no more Muslims were to come to the United States. He has all but said so. Since his election he has sent out tweets about everything from his inaugural crowd size to the ratings of *The Apprentice* but when a white supremacist killed Muslims in a mosque in Montreal he was completely silent. It seems clear that for Donald J. Trump Muslim lives do not matter. So sad.

My hope is that the rest of the world will see that Donald Trump and his cohort in the White House do not represent the "real America." It is the thousands of Americans who have taken to the streets to support Muslims and speak out against Islamophobia who are our best representatives. And in the end I believe it is these hopeful voices who will win out over the voices of the fear mongers.