

Muzzling a Muslim: The revocation of Tariq Ramadan's visa

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Most Americans, including most American Christians, are woefully ill-informed about Islam. It would seem like a good idea, then, to invite one of Europe's leading Muslim intellectuals to teach in the heartland of America at an institute devoted to peacemaking and to understanding the religious dimension of conflict. That's what Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies thought when it named Swiss scholar Tariq Ramadan to its faculty.

The Department of Homeland Security had other ideas. It revoked Ramadan's visa to teach in the U.S. No specific reason has been given other than a mention of a provision in the Patriot Act that bars foreigners who use a "position of prominence . . . to endorse or espouse terrorist activity."

Ramadan is not only the most prominent Muslim intellect in French-speaking Europe, recognized by *Time* magazine as one of the world's top 100 intellectuals. He is also the leading proponent of a "third way" in contemporary Islam—a way critical of fundamentalist versions of Islam but also critical of Western liberalism. His specifically European form of Islam is at home in a new cultural setting (Ramadan wrote a dissertation on Nietzsche). He articulates a version of Islam that can work for the common good while remaining faithful to the Qur'an.

Critics of Ramadan, such as Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum, point to Ramadan's family legacy—his grandfather founded the Egyptian Brotherhood in 1928—and claim he has ties to terrorist groups. Ramadan has forcefully rebutted such charges.

The Middle East Forum itself ran a positive review on its Web site of Ramadan's 1999 book *To Be a European Muslim*, calling it "a thoughtful and moderate analysis" of an Islam that views Europe neither as a place of repression nor a site for future takeover but rather as a "space for testimony." What changed the forum's view of Ramadan? Apparently it was his opposition to the Iraq war and his criticism of those

in France who support American and Israeli foreign policy.

It's true that Ramadan does not hide his Islamic commitments. But as a scholar, he submits his views to peer review and possible correction. Anyone with a commitment to the university as a marketplace of ideas and to academic freedom should see that the best way to deal with ideas deemed to be dangerous is through open debate, not by fearfully cutting off conversation before it begins.

Christians might add another perspective: We are in the business of reconciling enemies and making friends out of strangers. Neither is possible if we refuse even to meet them or listen to them.