



# **YASMINA'S** NECKLACE

School Matinee Series  
Study Guide

# YASMINA'S NECKLACE

by ROHINA MALIK

directed by ANN FILMER

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# A Note from the Playwright, Rohina Malik

## An Introduction to the Study Guide

There are almost 65 million refugees and internally displaced people, who were forced to leave their homes because of violence. That's one in every 122 people worldwide. The number of refugees and internally displaced people has reached its highest point since World War II.

I write plays because I'm distressed about the world we live in. With all our technological advances, we still live in a world where there is too much violence, dehumanization and ugliness. I spent some time talking to Chicago based Iraqi refugees. It was during those

conversations that I felt a strong need to write a play that examines the human cost of war.

My friend saw a woman in a grocery store, a cashier, wearing a necklace, the pendent was in the shape of Iraq, and inscribed on the pendent was "IRAQ." This was at a time when our country was deep into the war with Iraq, and when I would ask refugees where they are from, they would whisper "Iraq." And yet, here was this woman, with her necklace, and that's how Yasmina was born.

Around this time I was thinking of writing about my best friend, she's a Latina Muslim, wears the veil and is married to an Arab.

My friend and her husband are a very funny couple, they don't have kids, and I began to wonder who, if they had a son in this post 9/11 world, would he be? I asked this question at a time when many Muslim men, due to anti-Muslim bias, were changing their names, and that's how Sam was born.

Then I wondered, what if Sam meets Yasmina...

Welcome to *Yasmina's Necklace*.



*Interview with actor Michael Perez, playing Sam.*

# The Journey of Yasmina's Necklace: From Page to Stage

by JEFF SACHS



*Yasmina's Necklace, at 16th Street Theater. Photo by Joe Mazza. Courtesy of 16th Street Theater.*

This is not the first time that *Yasmina's Necklace* has come to the Goodman. In fact, the first version of this play was developed eight years ago at Goodman Theatre's New Stages Festival in 2009. The development of *Yasmina's Necklace* happened through numerous workshops and readings over the past eight years. What happened over those eight years? What does it take to bring a play from idea to script to stage? Who is involved in the play development process?

## Inspiration

A play starts its life as a barely formed idea, or a curiosity that the playwright has. In the note from playwright Rohina Malik (see page 2), she discusses the inspiration that led her to write *Yasmina's Necklace*. In this case, Malik started with two characters, an Iraqi refugee proud of her heritage and a Muslim-American who has changed his name to avoid persecution, and used the play to explore how they would interact. Sometimes a

playwright can find their inspiration in a location that intrigues them or an event or a time period. But no matter where the inspiration comes from, the playwright must take that wild inspiration and tame it into a first draft of their script.

## Play Readings

A playwright may go through many drafts of a script alone, but eventually they will need to hear it aloud. A play reading is when a group of people read a script out loud so the playwright can hear their characters come to life. Some play



readings can be very informal; perhaps the playwright invites some of their friends over to read the script in their living room. Whereas some play readings can have a week-long rehearsal period with actors, a director, and a dramaturg. Often at the Goodman, some readings are performed before an audience.

In a play reading, the director is responsible for working directly with the actors as they navigate the script. The director guides the actors as they try to understand their characters and the conflicts and struggles of the play and creates the physical movement, or blocking, in the case of a staged reading. A dramaturg acts as an advocate for the play. They help the playwright with an outsider's view

of the play in order to illuminate a script's strengths and weaknesses. A dramaturg will often mediate discussions between directors and playwrights about script alterations throughout the rehearsal process. *Yasmina's Necklace* went through three staged readings over six years directed by three different directors. The play had its first staged reading at Goodman Theatre's New Stages Festival in December 2009, directed by Goodman Artistic Associate Henry Godinez. It then went on to have another staged reading in 2012 at Chicago Dramatists directed by Goodman Resident Director Chuck Smith and a final staged reading at Silk Road Rising in 2015 directed by Corey Pond.

## Premiere and Subsequent Productions

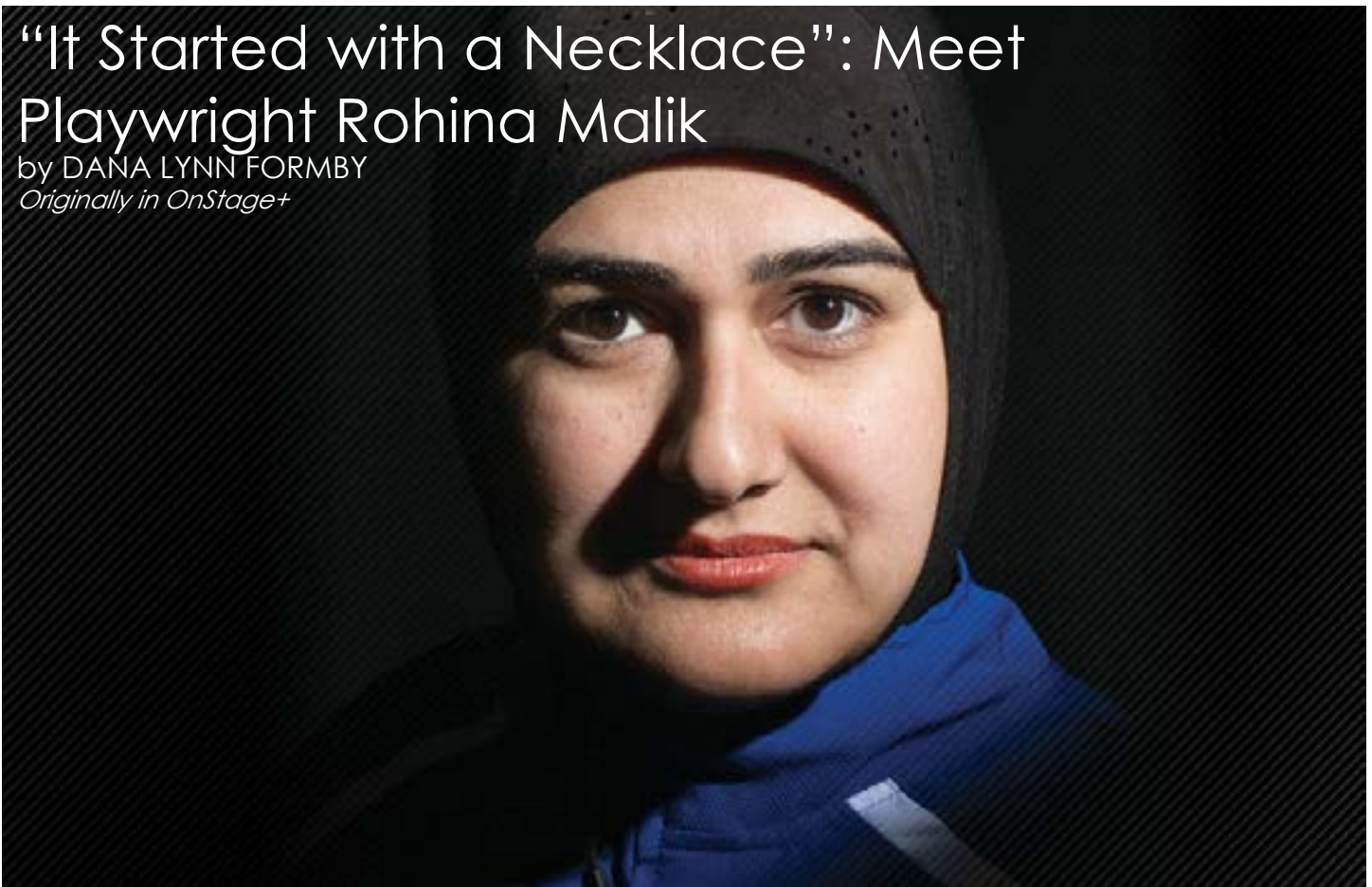
*Yasmina's Necklace* premiered in January 2016 at the 16th Street Theater in Berwyn, IL directed by Ann Filmer. When a play premieres, it is fully produced and performed at a theater with memorized lines, costumes, sets, lighting, and sound design for the very first time. A fully staged production will typically have 3-4 weeks of rehearsal, a week of technical rehearsals, and a week of preview performances before opening. Goodman Theatre will produce the second fully staged production of *Yasmina's Necklace*, representing a full circle journey since it was first presented as a staged reading eight years ago.



A photo from the 16th Street Theater's production of *Yasmina's Necklace*. Courtesy of Chicago Reader and 16th Street Theater.

# “It Started with a Necklace”: Meet Playwright Rohina Malik

by DANA LYNN FORMBY  
*Originally in OnStage+*



Shortly before rehearsals began, Rohina Malik spoke with dramaturg Dana Lynn Formby about her inspiration for *Yasmina's Necklace* and her journey as a playwright.

**Dana Lynn Formby:** What inspired this play?

**Rohina Malik:** It started with a necklace. My friend told me about a cashier he saw at a grocery store. She wore a necklace that had a pendant cut in the shape of Iraq, with the country's name in the center. This was when the U.S. was at war with Iraq, so to wear that at that time... something about hearing this really resonated with me. People can forget that other people have a love for their homelands that goes beyond politics. So, I began thinking about this woman and her necklace—and that's how *Yasmina*

was born. At the same time, I also noticed so many Muslim men were changing their names due to anti-Muslim bias, which disturbed me. I also thought about my friend who is a Latina Muslim from Puerto Rico and her husband is Arab. They are so hilarious and don't have children but I thought, what would their child be like? If they had a son, who would he be? He'd be half Puerto Rican, half Arab, born and raised in America. That's how the character Sam was born. Then I thought, what would happen if *Yasmina* met Sam?

**DLF:** Can you talk about why diversity and representation is important in your work?

**RM:** I'm really concerned about the portrayal of Muslims in our media. Often with our television

shows and films, roles that are written about Muslims are often written by people who are not Muslim, and they fall into problematic stereotypes. It concerns me to see Muslims frequent represented as the villain, the terrorist, somebody who's plotting something evil. Rarely do we see Muslims as normal human beings, and that's so dangerous. When I was writing my play *Unveiled*, I conducted a lot of research on hate crimes and found they never begin with the weapon—gun, knife, bat. It begins with an atmosphere of negative stereotyping and degrading language—and when those two things are left unchallenged, the result can be murder. I find that so frightening. So when we are bombarded by images of Muslims in this stereotypical way, it's dangerous



and important that I, as a Muslim playwright, can tell stories where Muslims are just normal people like everybody else. I'm hoping that things begin to change with time, and we can see more Muslims or folks from Arab-descent, Middle-Eastern descent, South Asia, able to tell their own stories.

**DLF:** You and Ann Filmer, the artistic director of 16th Street Theater in Berwyn, have worked together a few times over the past years. Why does she make for such a wonderful collaborator?

**RM:** I went to see a show at 16th Street Theater and loved that their mission was to tell the stories of all the different people representative of the community. You don't see that everywhere. Ann took a chance on my play

Unveiled; she produced a show I wrote and performed when I had no resumé. She's the kind of artist who takes chances on people. She was talking about diversity when it was not the cool thing to be talking about. And she wasn't just talking about it, she was implementing it. I love and appreciate that.

**DLF:** It was at a performance of Unveiled where you met Tanya Palmer, the Goodman's director of new play development, right?

**RM:** Yes, Tanya came to see Unveiled and I told her about Yasmina's Necklace. She read it and chose to include a staged reading of it at the Goodman's New Stages Festival in 2009, which was directed by Henry Godinez. And after that, I received my first commission. I can't stress enough the

importance of arts education. When we hear people talk about cutting the arts because they think math and science are more important than the arts, they are wrong. The arts connect us to our humanity, and that's something that cannot be void in our education. We need arts education. For me, I was a young woman, and I came to the Goodman and saw *Three Sisters*, a play that I had been studying. I remember, when the curtain rose and we saw that set, where even the curtains were moving from a gentle breeze, the whole audience broke into applause and I had never seen anything like that before. And it has stayed with me. The fact that today, in 2017, my play is being produced at the Goodman, it's just kind of come full circle for me. It's such a dream come true, and I'm so grateful.



*Interview with actor Susaan Jamshidi playing Yasmina*

# Islam 101

by ANNA GELMAN

## An Introduction

Islam is the newest great monotheistic, Abrahamic religion, finding its roots in Judaism and Christianity. The word literally means “submission” or “surrender”, in Arabic which indicates the necessity for a Muslim to give themselves and their lives over to a worship of God, or Allah. It originated in the southern part of southwest Asia, close to the Red Sea and the sacred Muslim city of Mecca. Religious practices include following the Five Pillars of Islam, which dictate how a good Muslim should live their life. The Five Pillars include profession of faith, prayer, charity, fasting and hajj (a ritual pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca). There are over 1.6 billion people in the modern world who identify as Muslim, and it is currently the second largest and

fastest growing religion.

## Muhammad

Muhammad was the prophet and leader of Islam. While non-Muslims generally recognize Muhammad as the “founder” of Islam, Muslims consider Muhammad to be a prophet who restored monotheistic faith like that preached by earlier prophets (such as the Old Testament’s Abraham and Moses, or the New Testament’s Jesus). According to the Islamic tradition, Muhammad worked as a merchant and frequently escaped to the mountains for days of seclusion and prayer. Around the time he was 40, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and he received his first revelation, that complete surrender to God was necessary. Muhammad went on to preach

for an all-powerful and merciful God (or Allah), and acknowledged that past prophets had preached similar messages. Muhammad lead the Islamic faith until his death, and he is still regarded as a model for Islamic life, in regards to his relationship with his family, his godliness, his faith and his morals.

## Sects of Islam

Much like Judaism and Christianity, Islam has divided into many sects; the most notable being the Sunni and the Shia. These two sects originally divided after the prophet Muhammad’s death, and originally for political reasons. The Sunni believed the next leader of Islam should be one of Muhammad’s disciples, whereas the Shia believed the leader should be a member of



*Masjid-al Haram, the largest mosque in the world. Image courtesy of [islamicfinder.org](http://islamicfinder.org).*





*Imam Al Gazali. Image courtesy of wikimedia commons.*

Muhammad's family. As a result, for most of history, the Shia haven't recognized elected Islamic leaders, instead following a line of Imams (or priests) that they believe were appointed by Muhammad and through Muhammad, God himself. Today, this separation has developed into several religious differences between the sects. However, most Muslims don't differentiate themselves by sect, simply describing their identity as Muslim.

## The Quran

The holy book of Islam, the Quran contains the preaching of the prophet Muhammad, and the word he received from God. "Quran" literally means "recitation" because its original incarnations were as public readings and sermons. It is filled with speech directly from God

through the Prophet, and usually addresses the reader through the plural first-person "we." However, it is only considered the direct word of God in Arabic, and in translation, it is considered interpretation. The Quran is considered perfect and infallible, and is a cornerstone of Muslim prayer and life.

## Vocabulary

**Mosque** – A building designated for prayer. The Arabic word for mosque is *masjid*.

**Minaret** – Literally translated as "lighthouse," – a tall spire with an onion-shaped dome that is an architectural feature of a mosque.

**Mihrab** – A semicircular section of one of the walls of a mosque,

that indicates the direction of Mecca, and the direction Muslims face while saying their daily prayers.

**Imam** – A Muslim leader who runs a mosque or leads a Muslim congregation in religious prayer.

**Khalif** – A leader in the Muslim religious community.

**Islamophobia** – A term referring to prejudice, hatred or fear towards Muslims, or the religion of Islam.

**"Salaam Alaykum!" "Wa alaykum Salaam!"** – A greeting and response in Arabic that means "Peace be unto you."

**"Masha Allah"** – An Arabic phrase that means "God has willed." An expression of joy, praise, or thankfulness, especially after receiving good news.

**"Inshallah"** - An Arabic phrase that means "God willing" or "if God wills it." An expression used when one hopes for an event to occur in the future

**Bismillah** – The opening phrase of the Quran. It can also refer to the first word in the Quran, meaning "In the name of God."

**Imam Al Gazali** – (1058CE – 1111CE) A highly regarded and well-known Islamic philosopher. Known as *Hujjat al-Islam*, or "Proof of Islam."

**Dunya** – In the Quran, "dunya" references the earthly world, its concerns and possessions, as opposed to the domains of the hereafter.

# The Muslim Vs. Arab World

by ELIZABETH RICE



Over the past few decades, “Arab” and “Muslim” have become synonymous. However, in *Yasmina’s Necklace*, we meet multiple characters who are Muslim but not Arabic. Like many misconceptions linked to Muslims, one only needs to peel back the surface to find how vast and complex this topic is.

## What is the Arab world?

“Arab” is a widely used adjective that connotes the people from a geographic area known as the Middle East. It is not a racial identifier. While there is not a set rule that delineates the meaning of Arab, it is widely accepted that the “Arab World” denotes the 22 countries, most in North

Africa, rather than the Middle East, that speak or use Arabic as their primary language. These include all of the following countries:

**Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen**

While these countries are often grouped under the term “Arab,” multiple unique ethnic and cultural groups with varying traditions and customs live throughout this area of the world. These include

Kurds, Armenians, Berbers, Turkmen, and Assyrians. You will also notice that Iran and Turkey are not on this list, despite being geographically near these other countries, because their primary languages are Farsi and Turkish, respectively.

## What is the Muslim World?

Muslims are practitioners and followers of Islam. According to a 2009 study by the Pew Research Center, there are 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, almost a quarter of the world population in 2009. In comparison, there was 306.8 million people living in the U.S. in 2009, 2.851 million of them in Chicago. One-fifth of the world’s Muslim population,  $\approx 317$





An historical map of "The Islamic World." Courtesy of EdMaps

million people, live in countries where Islam is not the dominant religion. For example, China has more Muslims than Syria, while Russia is home to more Muslims than Jordan and Libya combined. While Muslims live on all six inhabited continents (North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia), two-thirds of the world's Muslim population live in the following 10 countries, primarily in Asia and Africa:

**Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Egypt\*, Nigeria, Iran, Turkey, Algeria\*, Morocco\***

Only three of the listed countries(\*) use Arabic as a primary language. While 80% of Muslims live in countries where Islam is practiced by the majority population, about three-quarters of the remaining Muslim population live in India, Ethiopia, China, Russia, and Tanzania. Thus, it is important to note that not all Muslims are Arab.

While Islam is the most practiced religion in the "Arab world," a small subset of citizens also practice other religions including:

**Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Yazidism, Sabeen**

### **Mandaeism, Baha'i Faith, Zoroastrianism, Druze, Sikhism, Parsism, Folk Religions**

Thus, it can be inferred that not all Arabs are necessarily Muslim.

As war and strife continue to affect areas of the world with Arab and Muslim populations, more and more Muslim and Arab refugees will seek shelter in other more stable countries, redistributing the world's Muslim and Arab populations. For ways to help incoming refugees, check out the article on page 25.



# How America Creates Extremism: ISIS and the Iraq War

by JORGE SILVA

At the beginning of his presidency, Donald Trump enacted Executive Order 13769, or more commonly known as the “Muslim Ban,” which barred entry to anyone from seven majority Muslim nations into the US. The political discourse was littered with the word ‘refugee,’ citing these displaced populations as hubs or entry points for potential terrorists. The ban was met with heavy protests and ultimately was blocked by a federal judge. Despite intense criticism, the White House’s rhetoric continued to espouse - without any proof - that the refugees entering the United States were prone to radicalization and were a

threat to American citizens. The national media focus panned to immigrants and refugees from these Middle Eastern nations targeted by the executive order, but failed to remind the public of the conflicts that had brought them to our soil and the role the US has played in fomenting violence. In order to better understand a refugee crisis, it is important to understand the driving force that causes displacement on a large scale. Famine, pestilence, and fear of persecution can all be causes for people to seek refuge elsewhere, however, it is war that is the most recognizable today. The Islamic State, or ISIS, is one

of the militant groups that this and the previous administration have referenced as enemies of the state. Though they may seem like a recently formed group, their roots go as far back into the Cold War as does their relationship with the US. Below, a timeline connects the early movements the US helped foment to current unrest that has created one of the largest refugee crises in modern history. By dissecting the eras of these militant groups, we can see the results of US intervention in the Middle East over the last few decades and the responsibility the White House has to anyone seeking refuge from the decades of conflict.

## HOW AMERICA CREATES EXTREMISM: ISIS AND THE IRAQ WAR

*A timeline history of ISIS and America's relations with the middle east and terrorism.*

# Clothing in the Arab World

by WALKER ZUPAN

Today, what is commonly referred to as the “Arab World” is a vast geographical region stretching from Morocco in northwest Africa to the Arabian Sea, some 5,000 miles away. While many of the Arab World’s 425 million inhabitants are connected through their usage of the Arabic language and adherence to the religion of Islam, the region is made up of 22 independent nations, all of which contain countless regional dialects, and an astoundingly diverse array of ethnic, cultural, and religious traditions (see articles on pgs 9-10). This is particularly apparent in the clothes worn throughout the region on a day to day basis and for special

occasions. For an introduction to the highly particular forms of traditional, female dress to be found in a few of the region’s countries, [click here](#).

Despite the “Arab World’s” extraordinary diversity of dress, individuals unfamiliar with the region tend to perpetuate a number of harmful stereotypes about its residents and the clothes they wear. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of the Hijab, or translated loosely, covering. Though the term is most often used to describe a type of veil worn by millions of women throughout the region that covers the hair and neck, it is also frequently associated with a

variety of other garments such as the [niqab](#), [burqa](#), or [abaya](#) which cover most of the body.

Though many assume that Islam commands the wearing of the Hijab, the word does not appear once in the Quran (the holy book of Islam) in reference to clothing. Only three, rather vaguely worded passages, speak to female dress and all are rooted in highly specific historical and social contexts. For more information on this topic, check out Samina Ali’s TED talk, below.

Though men and women’s dress throughout the “Arab World” has varied widely over the course of the past 14 centuries, the veil



*Samina Ali's TED talk on the Quran's narrative on the hijab*



*Ifat Gazia, in her hijab, which she says is part of her personality. Photo courtesy of Al Jazeera.*

has become increasingly common in the region in the last four decades. Though scholars debate the underlying causes of this shift, people from the United States and Western Europe all too often assume the veil to be nothing more than a symbol of female oppression. Muslim women living within and outside the Arab World, however, often have a starkly different and far more nuanced perspective on what wearing a hijab means to them. For a number of personal stories, [click here.](#)

Though some Arab women claim to have experienced direct or indirect pressure to veil, the overwhelming majority affirm that it is entirely their choice. They argue that wearing the Hijab enables them to claim space in the public sphere, participate in mixed-gender social and economic activities, and ward off verbal and physical harassment in the street. For these women,

it is an act of self-preservation and political resistance. For others, it is a powerful means of self-expression, a connection to one's spirituality. For many women throughout the region, it is a symbol of defiance against Western European and American imperialism—forces that would have them believe that their culture, and dress in particular, is somehow inferior. And, finally, for many Arab women, they choose to wear what they wear, including the Hijab, because of how it makes them look and feel— and they are exhausted with other's attempts to find some grand significance in their wardrobe.

In the first scene of *Yasmina's Necklace* we learn that Yasmina and her father Musa are originally from Baghdad, the capital city of Iraq. In creating costumes for characters who come from a particular time,

place, and cultural milieu, designers must pay careful attention to the forms of dress common to that context and allow that information to guide their work. This often involves extensive background research and conversations with the director about their vision for the story and the role various characters play within it.

Want to know more?  
Click any of these links  
to discover the sources  
for this article, and get  
more in-depth informa-  
tion.

[Al-Jazeera: The Veil](#)

[Paul Eid on the Hijab](#)

[Vimeo: Clothing in the Arab World](#)



# Unpacking Terrorism

by WALKER ZUPAN

The Oxford English Dictionary defines terrorism as “the use of violence to create terror or fear, in order to achieve political, religious, or ideological aims.” Given the inherently broad nature of this definition, a number of questions emerge: What exactly can be considered a terrorist act? Can it be committed by individuals as well as organizations and governments? What does terrorism look like in the United States today, as well as historically? What misconceptions and stereotypes

surround the terms terrorism and terrorist?

In exploring these questions, it is important, first, to address a number of deeply harmful myths. Over 95% of U.S. terrorist attacks are carried out by non-Muslims. Nonetheless, many Americans have come to automatically associate Islam, and Muslims of Arab descent in particular, with terrorism. In the years following the attacks of September 11th, powerful politicians, such as Donald Trump, and the mass media have played

a vital role in this process. News, television, and radio agencies have been proven to give vastly disproportionate attention to the rare acts of terrorism committed by Muslims, generating skewed perceptions of the most common perpetrators of terrorist acts in the U.S. As a direct result of this repeated linking of terrorism with Muslim identity, Islamophobia (hostility or prejudice towards Muslims) is on the rise; in the past decade and a half there has been a steady increase in anti-Muslim acts of violence, such as



*The famous sketch of the Unabomber, one of the most famous examples of an American terrorist. Picture courtesy of Polygon.*

harassment, arson, and assault across the country.

Though rarely addressed in mainstream media, right wing extremists, (the overwhelming majority of whom are white, male, and U.S.-born citizens) have actually been the largest source of domestic terror attacks in the past several decades. These extremists, many of whom believe in white supremacist and anti-government ideologies, turn to violence—against people of color, non-Christians, abortion providers, and government and law enforcement officials—in what they believe is a fight to save America. Though many act as “lone-wolf” attackers, others are connected to decades-old racist and extremist movements such as the KKK. According to many who work in law enforcement, the problem is only getting worse. In 2015, for example, several confidential sources notified the FBI that members of a variety of anti-government militias were conducting surveillance on Muslim schools, community centers and mosques in nine states for sinister “operational purposes.”

The word terrorism is most often used to describe the acts of individual attackers and extremist organizations. Yet, on the basis of the definition mentioned at the outset of this article, it can also be applied to the actions of established governments, including our own, who use violence to generate fear. Though it is rarely addressed in U.S. History and Social Studies textbooks, the FBI conducted a series of covert and often blatantly illegal operations throughout the 1950s and 60s aimed at “surveilling,

infiltrating, discrediting, and disrupting” American political organizations—operations that are today deemed by countless historians and activists as a form of terrorism. As a part of a program referred to as COINTELPRO, groups and individuals deemed “subversive” were targeted, silenced, and suppressed including Anti-Vietnam War organizers, activists of the Civil Rights and Black Power movement, feminist organizations, and labor and socialist unions. Tactics used by the FBI included harassment via the legal system (often on the basis of fabricated testimony and evidence) and illegal break-ins, assaults, beatings and assassinations in hopes of frightening and eliminating those critical of the U.S. government and economic elite. One such raid took place right here in Chicago, in the East Garfield Park neighborhood when the FBI collaborated with the Chicago Police Department to raid the home of Black Panther Party chairman, Fred Hampton; Hampton was ultimately shot at point blank range, while asleep in bed with his partner.

Though rarely discussed, the U.S. government has also, at various times in recent history, provided financial and military support to terrorist organizations and repressive, authoritarian regimes. In the Cold War era, much of this support was offered to groups that the U.S. government hoped would destabilize political movements and regimes allied with the Soviet Union (even if they were democratically elected and enjoyed widespread

popular backing). Support was also provided for regimes that promised to maintain economic policy beneficial to U.S. business interests even if they brutally repressed and murdered their own people such as in Nicaragua and the Congo.

Finally, in looking back at that initial definition, it is clear that state-sponsored terrorism is alive and well in the U.S. today, too. Countless human rights activists, including the UN working group of experts on Peoples of African Descent, have described the actions of U.S. law enforcement officials in communities of color as a form of racial terrorism—pointing specifically to the use of military grade weaponry in policing, the systematic murder of black and brown people, and the utter lack of consequences for those who commit these crimes. Activists and journalists have also extensively documented the use of torture, a unique, and particularly insidious form of terrorism in detainment facilities such as Guantanamo Bay, detention centers near the U.S.-Mexico border, and interrogation sites such as Homan Square, right here in Chicago.

In tandem with efforts to debunk vicious stereotypes that equate Islam with terror, it is essential to examine forms of terrorism rarely given attention in mainstream media and educational materials, in order to better understand and organize against them.

# Contemporary Iraqi Art

by ANNA GELMAN

Today, Baghdad is a hotbed of artistic experimentation and tradition. The National Museum of Iraq, located in the center of the city, displays relics from ancient Mesopotamia, the beginnings of civilization. Across town is the Kurdish Textile Museum, displaying cultural items of the Kurdish people including intricate weavings, and the Baghdad Museum, which houses an illustrated history of the city. All around the city and country, filmmakers, visual artists and poets live and create their work, “where western artistic traditions - including ballet, theatre, and modern art – are juxtaposed with more traditional Middle Eastern forms of Artistic expression” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Even in times of turmoil, Iraqi artists have flourished and responded to the political atmosphere of their home, creating a rich history of politically and deeply human art. For more information, check out [Encyclopedia Britannica’s article on Iraqi art](#), [The Culture Trip’s article on 10 Iraqi Artists you should know](#), or learn more about Iraqi-American artist through [The Iraqi Art Project](#).



*The Creator's Project on Contemporary Iraqi Cinema*



# The Art of *Yasmina's Necklace*

by ELIZABETH RICE

For *Yasmina's Necklace*, the Goodman has partnered with two artists to flesh out the world of the play. While traditionally props or scenic artists will create or recreate artworks for performances, for example [Mark Rothko's work in \*Red\*](#) or [the Seurat painting in \*Sondheim's Sunday in the Park with George\*](#). However for *Yasmina's Necklace*, the Goodman is working with local artist Ahmad Abdulrazak for all of *Yasmina's* work on stage. Abdulrazak juxtaposes traditional Arabic calligraphy on abstract backgrounds. He paints with bold strokes and color on textured surfaces, like canvas and paper. Originally from Iraq, Abdulrazak, received a B.A. from the Fine Arts Academy at Baghdad University. He's a member of the Iraqi Cultural Center for Calligraphy and Deco and the Iraqi Calligraphers Syndicate – Baghdad, in addition to

other arts groups. His works have been show in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Tunis. He represented Iraq in writing the 23rd part of the Al Sham Quran, the world's largest Quran. You can see Abdulrazak's work on stage and in the lobby before the show.

In addition to Abdulrazak's work, the Goodman will showcase images from freelance photographer [Jim Lommasson, from his series, "What We Carried: Fragments from the Cradle of Civilization,"](#) a collaboration with Iraqi and Syrian refugees in America. The following description was excerpted from Lommasson's artist statement:

"I asked each participant to share with me an item they brought with

them on their journey to the US. The objects ranged from family photos to a Qur'an, jewelry to a game of dominoes. I photographed the object and then returned the 13" x 19" archival print to its owner to provide personal reflections by writing directly onto the photograph. The participants' additions give voice to the universal plight of refugees throughout time. I hope viewers will imagine themselves making decisions about what they would gather before leaving their homes forever."

Yasmina's father, Musa, shares that he brought his wife's tea set when escaping Iraq. What do you think he would write to Lommasson about the item?



*A piece of Ahmad Abdulrazak's art. Courtesy of the artist.*

# Muslim Marriage Traditions

Compiled by ANNA GELMAN

Every culture has its own traditions, especially when it comes to big life events. When it comes to weddings, Muslim cultures across the world have traditions that are both familiar and unfamiliar to non-Muslim Americans. Read about some of the customs observed for Muslim weddings below, as well as traditions specific to Iraqi culture. Ask yourself: how do these traditions and customs compare to what we think of as a “traditional” wedding in the United States? How do you think some of these customs have been americanized for Muslim Americans?

## Practices

The only requirement for Muslim weddings is the signing of a marriage contract. Marriage traditions differ depending on culture, Islamic sect, and observance of gender separation rules. Most marriages are not held in mosques, and men and women remain separate during the ceremony and reception. Since Islam sanctions no official clergy, any Muslim who understands Islamic tradition can officiate a wedding. If you are having your wedding in a mosque, many have marriage officers, called qazi or madhun, who can oversee the marriage.

## Meher

The marriage contract includes a meher – a formal statement specifying the monetary amount the groom will give the bride. There are two parts to the meher: a prompt due before the

marriage is consummated and a deferred amount given to the bride throughout her life. Today, many couples use the ring as the prompt because the groom presents it during the ceremony. The deferred amount can be a small sum – a formality – or an actual gift of money, land, jewelry, or even an education. The gift belongs to the bride to use as she pleases, unless the marriage

breaks up before consummation. The meher is considered the bride’s security and guarantee of freedom within the marriage.

## Mehndi

Also known as henna, mehndi is a skin decoration that is applied to the bride’s hands and feet, as well as to those of other women in the bride and groom’s family. This festive, colorful celebration



*A contemporary Muslim Wedding. Courtesy of brides.com.*



*An Iraqi Wedding Dance. Courtesy of Youtube.*

includes lots of music and women in traditional lenghas.

### **Barat**

The Barat is the groom’s arrival at the bride’s home. You may see a groom riding in on a decorated white horse, surrounded by revelers. With lots of music and dancing, the bride’s family welcomes the groom with a floral garland and sweets.

### **Nikah**

The marriage contract is signed in a nikah ceremony, in which the groom or his representative proposes to the bride in front of at least two witnesses, stating the details of the meher. The bride and groom demonstrate their free will by repeating the word *qabul* (“I accept,” in Arabic) three times. Then the couple and the two witnesses sign the

contract, making the marriage legal according to civil and religious law. Following traditional Islamic customs, the bride and groom may share a piece of sweet fruit, such as a date. If men and women are separated for the ceremony, a male representative called a wali acts in the bride’s behalf during the nikah.

### **Valima**

The valima is the reception, usually hosted by the groom’s parents. Traditionally, the valima takes place the night after the wedding, though it can also immediately follow the nikah.

### **Vows and Blessings**

The officiant may add an additional religious ceremony following the nikah, which usually includes a recitation of the Fatihah – the first chapter of the Quran – and durud (blessings). Most Muslim couples do not recite vows; rather, they

listen as their officiant speaks about the meaning of marriage and their responsibilities to each other and to Allah. However, some Muslim brides and grooms do say vows, such as this common recitation:

Bride: “I, (bride’s name) offer you myself in marriage in accordance with the instructions of the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him. I pledge, in honesty and with sincerity, to be for you an obedient and faithful wife.”

Groom: “I pledge, in honesty and sincerity, to be for you a faithful and helpful husband.

*Content from this article was pulled from and originally printed on [The Knot](#) and [Brides](#) websites. For more information, visit their websites.*



# Parents & Marriage: Yasmina's Necklace and 3 Other Stories

by REBECCA WATSON

*Originally printed in Onstage+*

In *Yasmina's Necklace*, Sam (Abdul Samee Marcario Lopez Hassan) defies his parents' wishes not only by changing his name to the much more American-sounding Sam but also by denying their attempts to arrange a marriage for him. Freshly off a divorce from an American woman, Sam is doubtful, not just of his parents' matchmaking abilities, but also of his own to open up to love again. Of course, this is what leads us to the fateful meeting between Sam and Yasmina,

envisioned by all but the intended couple as a meet-cute to warm them up to the idea of an arranged match.

*Yasmina's Necklace* is not alone in depicting meddling yet endearing parents trying to match their kids up with the perfect partner. We look back on some of our favorite marriage stories involving intrusive, but ultimately well-meaning, parents

## **Pride and Prejudice**

How could you not include Jane

Austen's 1813 novel in a list about marriage? Of course, all of Austen's novels had something to say about Edwardian England's marital milieu, but *Pride & Prejudice* has especially found its way into our hearts (Colin Firth's turn as Mr. Darcy in a 1995 adaptation didn't hurt either).

The central concern of the Bennet family, made up of 6 daughters and their parents, is to find economically fortuitous marriage matches, hopefully one which includes at least a bit of emotional attachment. Elizabeth Bennet's mother tries to fix her up with the outrageous Mr. Collins while Mr. Darcy's aunt attempts to cement a match between him and her daughter. By denying these financially advantageous matches, Elizabeth and Darcy reject the partners their parents prefer to pursue their romantic feelings for each other. The novel ends with their decision to marry, something which would have delighted Elizabeth's financially fledgling family but perhaps ostracized Darcy from his.

## **MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING**

This Chicago-set film was a sleeper hit upon its 2002 release. Combining clashing cultures with an endearing set of kooky characters, this romantic comedy touched the hearts of millions with its love-conquers-all message.



Poster for *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Image courtesy of Wikipedia.

The story follows the trials and tribulations of Toula (Nia Vardalos) as she attempts to weave around her family's traditions and concerns to marry the man of her dreams. Her mother and father are slow to accept her boyfriend-turned-fiancé Ian (John Corbett) because he is not the Greek man they had always intended for her. Eventually both sides of this scuffle soften; Toula gains an appreciation for her concerned, perhaps overprotective, but ultimately well-meaning family while they begin to accept Ian as one of their own.

## THE BIG SICK

A surprise hit at 2017 summer cinemas, this other Chicago-based romantic comedy told the true-life story of how co-writers Emily V. Gordon and Kumail Nanjiani met and fell in love. Emphasizing the ability to find brightness and love, even in the seemingly darkest of times, *The Big Sick* was a small movie that made a big impact this summer.

Caught between his own desires and those of his traditional Pakistani parents, Kumail (Kumail Nanjiani) meets and romances grad student Emily. Clashing over differing imagined futures, Emily gets sick and is put into an

induced coma. Kumail comes to acknowledge the depth of his feelings for Emily as he bonds with her parents (Holly Hunter and Ray Romano) in the hospital waiting room. In the end, Kumail must confront his well-intentioned parents who are constantly inviting over potential brides, hoping for an arranged marriage; he wants to honor his family but he cannot deny his feelings towards Emily. The film equally weighs the importance of family and acceptance, and the true-to-life nature of the story gives the conclusion a special significance



*An image from The Big Sick. Image courtesy of Vox.com.*



# Making a New Home in Chicago: Chicago Sun-Times' Maudlyne Ihejirika Reflects on the Experience of Local Refugees

by MAUDLYNE IHEJIRIKA

As I absorbed *Yasmina's Necklace*, I was transported back nearly 50 years, to when my mother arrived at O'Hare Airport on June 9, 1969, with six small children.

We were refugees of the Nigerian-Biafran War (July 1967–January 1970), here to reunite with my father, who had been studying abroad when the war broke out—separating he and my mother for nearly three years. Settling on Chicago's Near South Side, my family, like Yasmina and her father Musa, were strangers in this new land, haunted by having witnessed unspeakable violence and death in surviving a war in which two million of our Igbo tribe were killed through massacre and starvation.

We were one Biafran family coming alone to this country; yet we did not remain so. Immediately, we were taken in by Chicago's small Nigerian community, and my early memories include running and playing with other Biafran children at occasional events hosted by Nigerian community organizations. There, I'd be enveloped by familiar sights, sounds and smells—brightly colored native wear, Igbo language replacing the English I struggled to master in school, Nigerian delicacies consoling a child's confusion.



*Maudlyne Ihejirika today.*

So it is, and has been, for every wave of immigrants landing on America's shores: whether as a refugee like Yasmina and Musa, or voluntarily migrating here in search of opportunity, as the play's character Ali. Upon arrival, we search out our own. And once found, that ethnic community, be it loosely structured or cohesive, offers a cocoon of the familiar while navigating foreign new ways in a new land. Opportunity's roadmaps.

In Chicago, a city where recent studies find its dubious title as one of the nation's most segregated cities still holds,

immigrants undeniably fold into its entrenched racial and socioeconomic segregation. Gravitating toward those accepting communities, every immigrant wave in the process forms its own sub-community, through which we nurture cultural, sustenance and religious institutions—for example, the mosque that is so central to Yasmina and Sam's world. This, then, is how newly arrived refugees Yasmina and Musa can become woven into the community that sustains the voluntary immigrant Ali, and impact his son Sam and wife Sara in a huge way. I encountered some of these sustaining communities





*The Ihejirika family in their apartment in the Near South Side South Commons neighborhood months after their arrival in Chicago.*

recently, as host of a Chicago Community Trust “On The Table” dinner themed “The Refugee Experience,” in May, through myriad organizations providing support and resources to immigrants. Often, their goal is to ensure refugees like Yasmina—arriving invisibly scarred and traumatized by atrocities of war—find a sense of the familiar (“normalcy,” if you will). There was the United African Organization, Syrian Community Network, Centro Romero (Central America), Arab American Action Network, The Hana Center (Asia), Ethiopian Community Association, Rohingya Cultural Center of Chicago; the list went on. Many can be found under the

umbrella of the advocate group Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR.org).

Such supportive immigrant communities are critical against the impact of racial and socioeconomic segregation, not only in Chicago, but nationwide; against America’s debilitating struggle with racism, and the more recently rising xenophobia at a time when the world grapples with the largest number of forcibly displaced people worldwide since World War II. Currently, nearly 60 million refugees around the world have been displaced by civil wars—as

playwright Rohina Malik notes, one in every 122 people.

Meanwhile, our nation wrestles with chaos in the immigration sphere. President Donald Trump’s administration has released travel bans prohibiting refugees/immigration from six Muslim majority countries, and temporarily closing the U.S. refugee program. The RAISE Act—a bill introduced in Congress in July, backed by the White House, aims to cut legal permanent immigration to the U.S. by half over the next decade; and the administration recently rescinded the Deferred Action

for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which protects 800,000 young people, who were brought to the U.S. as children, from deportation.

The city of Chicago has responded in many ways to the anti-immigrant, anti-refugee rhetoric, with Mayor Rahm Emanuel often noting his own grandfather emigrated to the U.S. from Moldova to escape the pogroms of Eastern Europe. Standing by its sanctuary city designation, Chicago has also launched a One Chicago campaign (OneChi.org), designed to highlight the city's vast diversity and immigrant roots, as well as provide additional support and resources to Chicago's 560,000 foreign-born residents.

As with Yasmina's father, every wave of immigrants battles an additional stigma of being foreign-born, in pursuing work,

education and opportunity against existing barriers of segregation and racism. My own mother, a highly credentialed educator who taught at a teacher's training college in Nigeria before the war, could only waitress upon arrival in Chicago, as her teaching credentials from a foreign country were not recognized. For my mother, it meant becoming an entrepreneur; and later, going back to school. It's why, on many occasions, I've gotten into a cab and engaged in conversation with the driver, only to find they hold a Master's degree or PhD, and had in their countries of origin been upper-income professionals. Like Musa, however, they were relegated to cab driving until able to obtain recognized credentials in the country they now also call home—for just as with Yasmina and Ali, most immigrants remain ever connected to their country of origin, be it tangibly or spiritually. The foreign-born stigma has only

become enhanced for many nationalities, against America's current ideological, political and racial divisions that tear at the very fabric of a nation. Americans are on a new journey that calls for deeper understanding of our differences, and open and honest discourse as to how we hold on to our American values through rational government policy. As we find with Yasmina and Sam, we must continue to walk together and talk together. And together, we'll create the path on which this journey leads.

*Maudlyne Ihejirika is a veteran Chicago Sun-Times reporter/columnist and author of *Escape From Nigeria: A Memoir of Faith, Love and War*, a riveting tale of her family's survival of the genocidal Nigerian-Biafran War.*

“So it is, and has been, for every wave of immigrants landing on America's shores... upon arrival, we search out our own. And once found, that ethnic community, be it loosely structured or cohesive, offers a cocoon of the familiar while navigating foreign new ways in a new land. Opportunity's roadmaps.”

# How You Can Help Refugees

by SAYA JENKS

With additional sources compiled by REBECCA WATSON  
for Onstage+



*Syrian refugee Abdulkarim Younes, who has resettled in Chicago with his wife and daughter, Bisan, is anxious about whether his mother and siblings will be allowed to join him in the United States. Photograph and caption courtesy of Chicago Tribune & Refugee One. Brian Cassella / Chicago Tribune)*

As a young person, you can play a key role in helping refugees integrate into your community and making Chicago a more welcoming place. [According to The Refugee Center refugees:](#)

“face significant barriers to integration: barriers that include information overload and confusing information, culture shock and isolation, depression and PTSD. In spite of these barriers, refugees are expected to become self-sufficient within eight months of arriving in the United States. Many are unaware of existing social services and may under-utilize available resources. They often struggle to

learn English and find living-wage jobs, housing, healthcare, education, and transportation. Refugees need more and better information about life in the US in order to transition to their new lives and become integrated.”

It can feel like issues like the refugee crisis are too complicated for you to be able to help, but on the contrary, high school students can actually do a lot to advocate for refugees. You can fundraise for refugee relief organizations, be a friend to student refugees at your school, and encourage your local representatives to support refugees.

**Fundraise.** What refugee centers often need most is money. Since you likely don’t have much income as a high school student, you can organize fundraising events that have the simultaneous benefits of a) raising money for refugee relief groups and b) raising awareness in your community about refugees.

Come up with creative ways to fundraise: you could organize a fun run or basketball tournament in your neighborhood, or auction off art pieces made by students at your school. People are often more likely to donate if they get something in return, like a work



of art or the experience of participating in a community event. How can you make potential donors feel invested? After your event, pick one of these Chicago organizations to donate the proceeds to.

**Volunteer.** First, take this online course created by [The Refugee Center](#) on working with refugees: it aims to make volunteers more effective and culturally sensitive to refugees' needs. Next, research organizations that accept high school-aged volunteers. Organizations may need help with outreach to let refugees know about resources, with research (if you're good at going down internet rabbit holes to find information, this would be a great job for you!), and with translation. If you can't fill a particular organization's volunteer needs, create your own volunteer opportunities by leading refugee support efforts in your community.

**Collect material donations.** Look up what items refugee centers need – they often need items such as new and or gently used kitchenware, bedding, personal hygiene products, and cleaning supplies to help refugees set up households in the United States. Organize a drive your school, community center, or place of worship to collect these items and donate them to a local refugee aid organization. But first, be sure to check in with the organization about what they really need.

**Support refugee students at your school.** Think about how you would feel if you were starting at a new school in a foreign country where you didn't speak the language of instruction. How would you feel? What would you want your classmates to do to make you feel welcome? If you have classmates who are refugees and who are in the process of learning English, you can offer to practice conversational English with them or be their home-

work buddy after school. Invite them to join your club or sports team. You can also talk to your teachers and school administrators about how the entire school community can support refugees: you can volunteer to help organize an assembly to educate your school about issues facing refugees, or create a schoolwide community service day volunteering at a refugee relief center.

**Call your elected officials.** Even though you may be too young to vote, you are a future voter whom your government representatives will need to answer to in a few years. Look up which aldermen and members of Congress represent you, and find out what their stances on refugee policies are. Call their offices to voice your opinion on welcoming refugees to Chicago. Political organizers say that calling your representatives is more effective than emailing them because you'll be talking



*A family that benefits from Centro Romero's family services. Image courtesy of Centro Romero.*



*Courtesy of Refugee One.*

to a real person (most likely one of the official's staffers) who will then personally convey the message to your representative. If they can tell your congressperson that a high school student called them specifically to voice their concern about a particular issue, that will make a bigger impact than a forwarded email. Positive reinforcement works too: If you are happy with your representative's stance on refugees, let them know! For instance, Illinois' current senators are Tammy Duckworth and Dick Durbin, who have been supportive of refugees. Call their offices to thank them – that way they will know that their constituents still care about this and are watching to make sure they are making Illinois a welcoming state.

**Raise awareness.** One-on-one conversations go a long way in changing people's minds. If you

have friends or family who don't know much about the refugee crisis, think that refugees are dangerous, or don't think the refugee crisis affects them, engage them in a conversation about why supporting refugees matters to you. Your voice is powerful. You might be surprised at how big an impact you can make when you speak up about something that matters to you.

**Want to know how you can get involved in Chicago? Check out any of these organizations!**

#### [Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights](#)

The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) works to educate and organize immigrant and refugee communities across the state of Illinois. Partnering with member organizations, ICIRR actively advocates for equal access to education,

language, healthcare and civic information and programming among Illinois's immigrant and refugee populations. Their work helps integrate immigrants and refugees into the existing American community while simultaneously promoting both active participation and equivalent opportunities within that community.

#### [World Relief Chicago](#)

Part of an international foundation established after World War II, World Relief Chicago has been working since 1980 to assist in the resettlement of over 15,000 refugees across the Chicago area. In collaboration with partners and volunteers, World Relief Chicago assists refugees and immigrants navigate American culture and organization. By contributing help to find employment, apply for government aid or assistance, navigate the American immigration system, or learn the English language, World Relief Chicago is dedicated to offering a comprehensive resettlement program for immigrants and refugees from all over the world.

#### [Heartland Alliance](#)

Opened in Chicago in 1888, Heartland Alliance seeks to provide vulnerable populations with healthcare, housing and support. Throughout their almost 130 year history, Heartland Alliance provided a first response to any major crises, including reconnecting immigrant families separated at Ellis Island, seeking housing for those affected by the Great Depression, helping veterans of both World Wars readjust to civilian life and providing healthcare services during the AIDS epidemic. Now operating throughout the Midwest and in 20 coun-

tries internationally, Heartland Alliance provides help with housing, healthcare, employment and legal needs of immigrant, refugee and underserved populations.

### [RefugeeOne](#)

The largest resettlement agency in Illinois, RefugeeOne operates as the first point of contact for incoming refugees to the Chicago area. Working with refugees upon arrival at the airport, RefugeeOne provides furnished housing, language courses, employment search support, mental health-care services and community programming to aid refugees in adjusting to life in America and Chicago. Every year the organization works with more than 2,500 refugees and immigrants of all

backgrounds, faiths, ages and ethnic groups.

### [GirlForward](#)

Working in both Chicago and Austin (with a plan for a 2019 launch of a third location), GirlForward is an organization that focuses support on young women within refugee populations. Through their three core programs, GirlForward promotes the growth of young female refugees. Their Mentoring Program focuses on planning and acting for a fully-realized future, their Camp GirlForward encourages the development of English skills, and their Safe Spaces project provides the opportunity to connect with others in the community and organization.

### [Centro Romero](#)

Determined to bridge the gap between immigrant and refugee populations and mainstream American society, Centro Romero has been working for over 30 years to serve Chicago's northeast side. Their many programs include youth-based learning and leadership services, adult education courses, legal support and a myriad of family programming.



*GirlForward, Our Voices, Our Stories.*



# Cultural Assimilation, Pluralism, and Appropriation in America

by SAYA JENKS



*"The forced assimilation of Native American people." Courtesy of Gwich'in Steering Committee*

Have you ever changed the way you speak to sound more like your classmates? Been made fun of because the food your parents pack for your lunch is different than the other kids' PB&Js? Given yourself a less foreign-sounding nickname that would be more easily pronounceable for your American classmates? If so, you've felt pressure to assimilate into your community's dominant culture.

## **What is cultural assimilation?**

Encyclopedia Britannica defines assimilation as "the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society." Assimilation

happens when a minority group wants or needs to fit in with the dominant culture, either to thrive or merely to survive. We see this in *Yasmina's Necklace*: Abdul Samee changes his name to Sam because he doesn't want to stick out as un-American and become a victim of job discrimination. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, assimilation becomes complete when "the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the society."

## **Is assimilation a bad thing?**

It can be if an oppressive power dynamic is involved. Maisha Johnson, a writer for *Everyday Feminism*, explains that,

"marginalized groups don't have the power to decide if they'd prefer to stick with their customs or try on the dominant culture's traditions just for fun" – minority groups usually assimilate "in order to survive conditions that make life more of a struggle if they don't."

For example, if you only speak Spanish and move to a town where everyone else only speaks English, learning English might be a first step you would take to assimilate into the dominant culture. But members of the dominant group, the English speakers, are the ones who can determine whether or not your process of assimilation

becomes oppressive: the English speakers can help you find tutoring resources and offer to practice speaking with you, or they can make fun of you for not speaking the language and offer no support. The former attitude towards assimilation involves welcoming you into the community and helping to teach you about the customs, and the other shames you for being different without offering any means of helping you fit in.

Of course, some degree of assimilation, or at least compromise, is necessary for a society as diverse as the United States to function. As Tom Gjelten writes in *The Atlantic*, “to adopt a position of pure cultural relativism would be to accept some customs or traditions that are antithetical to broadly accepted American values and norms”: some cultures bar women from voting, allow discrimination based on sexuality or religion, or have other customs that the United States has decided conflict with our country’s values. So, while assimilation is inevitable, the dominant culture can decide whether it will be an inviting or isolating process.

### **Assimilation vs. Pluralism**

Critics of assimilation argue that assimilation strips people of their cultural identity and, taken to its extreme, results in a complete loss of cultural identity for all Americans – after all, all non-indigenous Americans are descended from immigrants. They argue that being American means accepting that because our country is a nation of

immigrants, we should let those separate cultures that exist within this country coexist without having to lose any part of their cultural identity. This point of view is also referred to as pluralism. According to political theorist Michael Walzer’s essay “What Does It Mean to Be an American?”, for cultural pluralists, “one proves one’s Americanism...by living in peace with all the other ‘Americans,’ that is, by agreeing to respect social manyness rather than by pledging allegiance to the ‘one and indivisible’ republic.” On the other hand, pro-assimilation critics of pluralism argue that if taken to the extreme, liberal pluralism would result in an utter lack of American identity and disregard for American values.

### **But what exactly are those “American values”?**

Walzer observes that “The Great Seal of the United States carries the motto *E pluribus unum*, ‘From many, one,’ which seems to suggest that manyness must be left behind for the sake of oneness.” This argument brings to mind the “melting pot” image that is often used to describe America: we visualize our country as a place where disparate ingredients (or cultures) lose their original form and meld with others, creating an entirely new cultures – an assimilationist model. But Walzer also points out that the image on the Great Seal is that of an eagle carrying “a sheaf of arrows. Here there is no merger or fusion but only a fastening, a putting together: many-in-one.” These arrows keep their original form but coexist in one bundle – that indicates pluralism.

So which is the America you see:

the arrows in a sheath metaphor with many cultures existing harmoniously but maintaining their differences (also known as pluralism), or the melting pot metaphor where unique cultures lose their identities and combine into one homogenous whole (assimilation)? Or is America a complex combination of the two?

### **Cultural Appropriation**

Cultural appropriation, which Johnson defines as “when somebody adopts aspects of a culture that’s not their own,” makes this debate about immigration, assimilation, and cultural pluralism even more complex. She adds that cultural appropriation usually involves “a particular power dynamic in which members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group.” Debates about cultural appropriation often come up at Halloween, music festivals, and themed college parties when people dress up as stereotypes or borrow clothing from another culture without understanding their significance. For example, wearing a coolie hat to dress up as a Chinese person or holding maracas and wearing a sombrero to dress up as a Mexican person for Halloween parties are still a common sight on many college campuses. *Teen Vogue* published a piece about how many Coachella attendees don “bindis, feathered headpieces, dashikis, [and] war paint” without understanding their cultural, or even spiritual, significance. *Teen Vogue* points out that cultural appropriation involves a basic level of disrespect and privileged

ignorance: “When you can’t see the humanity in people who are different from you, you find no fault in treating their sacred cultural symbols as something to be worn and discarded.”

It is absolutely possible to borrow from another culture without being appropriative: cultural exchange is what happens “when people share mutually with each other—because cultural exchange lacks that systemic power dynamic,” according to author K. Tempest Bradford. For example, say your friend whose family is from India invites you to her Diwali party and asks if you want to borrow her sari. You then learn about the Diwali celebration and how you can be an ally to the South Asian community in Chicago. That’s

cultural exchange, because it is done with respect, an intent to learn, and with permission from the person whose cultural outfit you’re putting on.

Especially in the arts, it can be difficult to navigate the murky waters between cultural exchange and appropriation. After all, as one Refinery29 article put it, “Creative people find inspiration anywhere. That’s part of the beauty of fashion and art. Taking only what you find personally pleasing, though, without taking the time to really understand the origin and context of certain objects, patterns, and forms is not a behavior that gets a free pass anymore.” If you find inspiration from another culture, that’s awesome. To ensure that you’re engaging in a respectful

cultural exchange, think about the history between your culture and the culture you are drawing inspiration from, whether the context you want to put piece of that culture is appropriate, and do your research.

**Want to learn more about assimilation and cultural appropriation?**

[- Everyday Feminism](#)

[- Teen Vogue on cultural appropriation at music festivals](#)

[- The Atlantic on whether or not immigration should require assimilation](#)

[- NPR’s CodeSwitch on the complicated issue of African-Americans appropriating African culture](#)



*Various celebrities and pop stars in looks that have been criticized as culturally appropriative. Courtesy of Wikipedia, MTV, and E and The Dailey Dot.*



# THEATER ETIQUETTE

## What Should I Wear?

For a lot of people, going to the theater is a special event, and they like to dress up for it. Remember: even though you are on a field trip you should dress according to your school's dress code. The Goodman is air conditioned, so bring a sweater or extra layer in case you get cold.

Be respectful to the artists on stage, and to your fellow audience members. No talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking. No use of phones or electronic devices – the glow from the screen is distracting to your fellow audience members and the actors (and yes, they can see it)!

Please remember: **no smoking, and no eating or drinking** while inside the theater.

## What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?

Only if it is an emergency. Otherwise, it's very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

## How should I respond to what's going on on the stage?

Honestly but appropriately. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most importantly, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feedback but might be offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe respect to the actors.





### What to do before the show:

When you arrive at the Goodman, you will be given a ticket. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance. If you are late, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission. Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program. Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

### What to do during Intermission:

Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, use the restroom, get some water, and discuss the play with your friends. We do ask that you remain on the floor where your seat is -- there are restrooms on both levels. When intermission is over, the lights in the lobby will flash several times. That is your cue to get back to your seat, because the performance is about to begin!

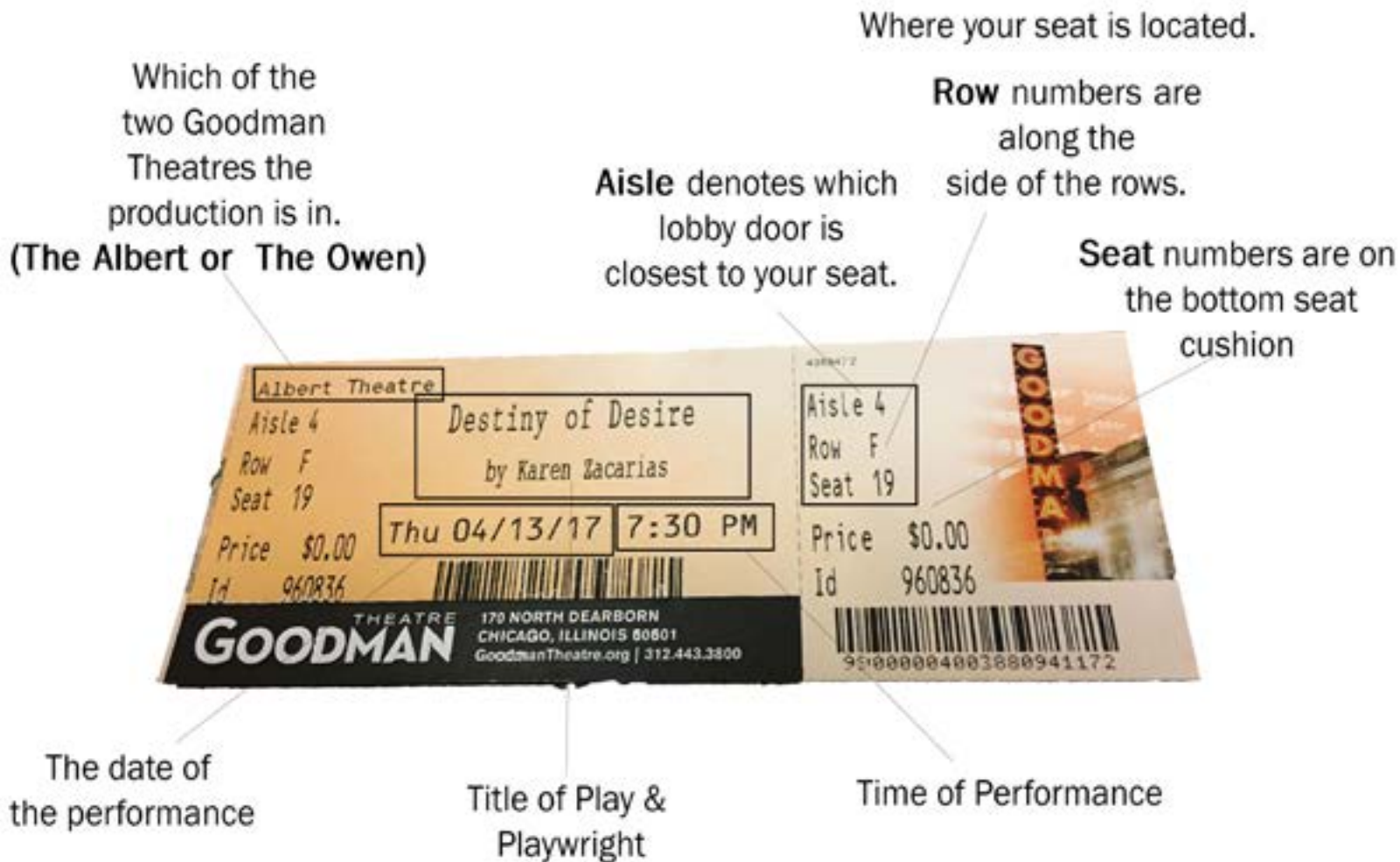
### What to do after the show:

There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the cast will come out on stage and answer your questions. Feel free to ask anything that's on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.

# READING YOUR TICKET

As a patron of the theatre, it is important to know how to read your ticket and find your seat. Generally, seats for all performances in the Goodman's Albert Theatre are assigned seating, so be sure to know how to be able to find your seat. When you come with your school, you will be ushered to a section where you and your fellow students can sit and enjoy the play together.

Below is an explanation of how to read your ticket, and all of the information that you can get from your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They're here for you!





**GOOD** THEATRE **MAN**