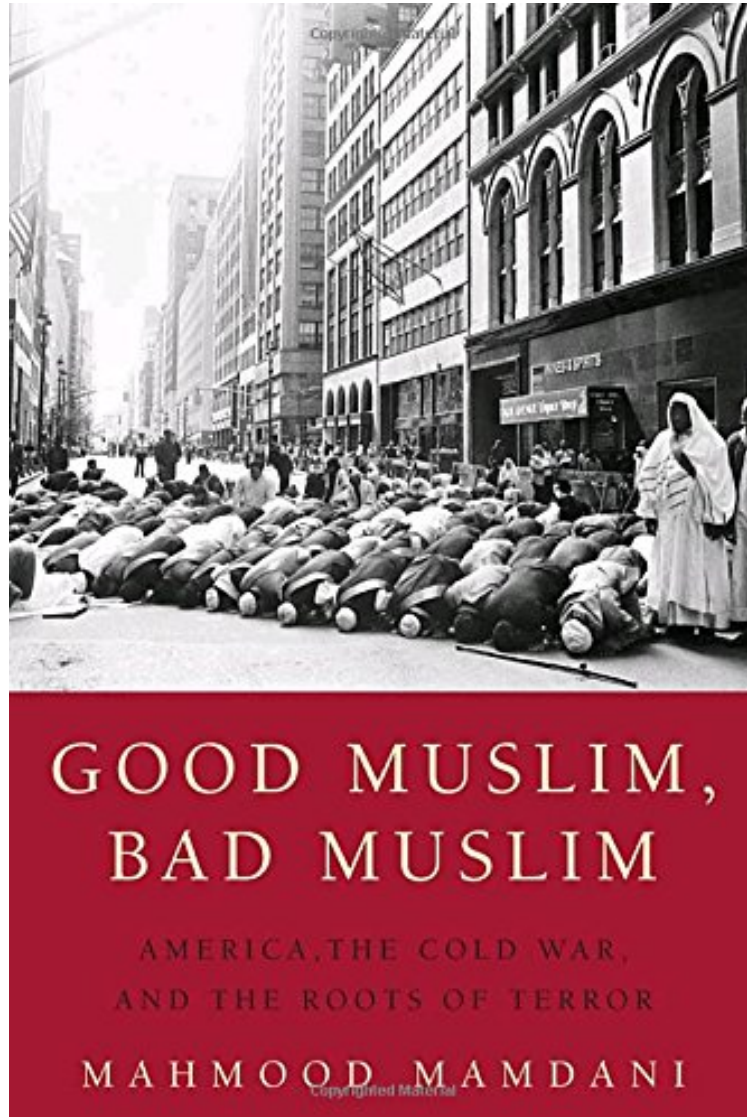


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Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror

Mahmood Mamdani

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In this brilliant look at the rise of political Islam, the distinguished political scientist and anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani brings his expertise and insight to bear on a question many Americans have been asking since 9/11: how did this happen? *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* is a provocative and important book that will profoundly change our understanding both of Islamist politics and the way America is perceived in the world today.

From Publishers WeeklyOsama bin Ladens pronouncements are rarely published in full in the United States, but transcripts of his messages-often available overseas-provide startling insight into the political, rather than religious, nature of his thinking. "Labeling us, and our acts, as terrorism is also a description of you and your acts," bin Laden said recently. "Our acts are a reaction to your acts." In this meandering rumination on modern-day terrorism, Mamdani takes a controversial step by agreeing with bin Laden, at least on this point; he argues that groups like al-Qaeda are generally motivated by legitimate political grievances with U.S. foreign policy. "In a nutshell," Mamdani writes, "the U.S. government decided to harness and even to cultivate terrorists" during the latter half of the Cold War as it sought to roll back the Soviet Unions global influence. Now, with that legacy coming back to haunt its creators, Mamdani concludes that "no Chinese wall divides our terrorism from their terrorism. Each tends to feed the other." These ideas evolved from a series of talks the author gave at New Yorks Riverside Church in the weeks after 9/11, and the book retains the informality of those discussions. There are flashes of inspiration, among them a thoughtful distinction between "political Islam" and "Islamic fundamentalism," two terms that are frequently and wrongfully used synonymously. There are also frustrating digressions, and Mamdani makes few attempts to address potential dissenters. Still, readers who can overlook these drawbacks will find that this study does make provocative connections across disciplines and continents-finding similarities, say, between Liberian and Zionist settlers. Mamdani is searching for big ideas, not nuances, and in this he is successful, making his book an important contribution to the national discussion on terrorism and Islam. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From BooklistMany of the many post-September 11 books probing the causes of Islamic terrorism invoke Samuel Huntington-esque notions about clashes of culture; many of the same books would like to dissociate the "war on terrorism" of the twenty-first century from the more conventional conflicts of the late twentieth century. Both these notions are Mamdani's targets in this book. Politicizing notions of Islam by differentiating between secular, Westernized ("good") Muslims and fanatical, medieval ("bad") Muslims, Mamdani argues, misrepresents the often apolitical character of Islam. It also dangerously ignores cold war-era American complicity in the turbulence of the Muslim world through the waging of proxy wars, particularly the one in Afghanistan in which, says Mamdani, the CIA created Osama bin Laden. Those familiar with Noam Chomsky's recent work will likely find some of Mamdani's arguments familiar, particularly his discussion of imperialistic political violence, racism, and the modern state. Where Mamdani is unique and particularly compelling, however, is in drawing on his African-studies background to back up his assertions about violence, terrorism and Islam. Brendan Driscoll Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved Mamdani strips open the lies, stereotypes, and easy generalizations on which U.S. policy toward the Muslim world is founded. Dismaying but essential reading. J. M. Coetzee This provocative and thoughtful inquiry raises hard and serious questions. It is a valuable contribution to the understanding of some of the most important developments in the contemporary era. Noam Chomsky *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* is a brief, readable plea to Americans to stop listening to the shuck and jive about a clash of civilizations and start learning some practical political history. The Village Voice