

“what is the real Islam?” but “why has this fundamentalist version of Islam become so powerful at this particular moment in time?”

**THE RISE OF FUNDAMENTALISM**

In the late 1940s, a small teachers college in Greeley, Colo., welcomed Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian educator and writer in his 40s, who came to America to study school curriculum. When Qutb began his intellectual career, he advocated secular reforms. But he had become very religious by the time of his voyage to America. The visit became the defining moment of a man widely regarded as spearheading a fundamentalist revival in the Muslim world. Although Greeley was conservative by American standards — the town was considered a place of temperance — Qutb saw it as a hub of depravity. He viewed the culture as corrupt and Americans as being trapped in their desires and selfish wants.

Qutb hated the well-kept lawns and saw them as proof of widespread individualism and lack of spirituality. He despised the vanity of men and women preoccupied with their bodies and said Americans were primitive warrior-like people who exuded passion for violence, as reflected in their fascination with wrestling and football.

His ultimate proof of America’s moral corruption was men and women brushing up against each other to the melody of “Baby, It’s Cold Outside,” a 1949 recording by Johnny Mercer and Margaret Whiting.

Although Qutb was a scholar, he failed to blend into the culture for a few reasons, his weak command of English among them. Racism was another — Qutb was dark-skinned, and America was still segregated. Also during his time in America, the United States was rallying behind the newly created state of Israel. He returned to Egypt and wrote the book “The America I Have

Seen” and decided his own country shouldn’t have the same fate. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood and, in the next decade, wrote some of the most influential works of Islamic fundamentalism.

In the mid-20th century, most Middle Eastern countries were trying to gain their own identity after a century of European colonial rule. In 1916, the French and the British divided the area into a handful of countries with limited experience in self-governance. Despite promises from the new governments of freedom, equality and enlightenment, most political experiments undertaken until the 1960s couldn’t solve the central issue of poverty, writes French scholar Gilles Kepel in “Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam.”

Nationalist regimes across the Middle East sidelined religion but delivered little on their promises. Poverty and corruption were rampant.

Even before Qutb returned from

America, Egyptian General Gamal Abdul Nasser had been trying to secularize his country. People were largely disappointed with the regime, but laid most of the blame on European colonialism and American foreign policy.

Qutb slapped the same label of corruption and oppressiveness on Muslim regimes. Qutb’s books, bestsellers in the region, resonated with the young, the disappointed and the disenfranchised in plain language that brought renewed attention to religion.

He said Muslims and non-Muslims alike were in a state of jahiliyya, a concept drawn from the Quran that’s used to describe the “age of ignorance,” a time before the prophet Muhammad when Arabs worshipped multiple gods.

Qutb’s jahiliyya was much more, though; it was an illness, a state of ignorance in which people replaced the rule of God with the rule of man. Muslims had strayed from Islam and were being “Westoxicated.” ▶▶▶

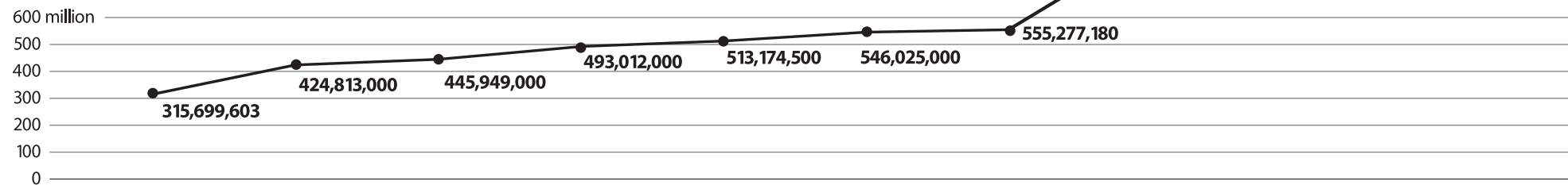


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**ISLAM SINCE 1950**

The face of Islam has changed drastically in the past five decades. Along with a significant and steady growth in the number of Muslims, there has been an increasingly visible strain of fundamentalism among the religion’s practitioners.



1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
<p><b>1954:</b> Gamal Abdul Nasser, the foremost proponent of Arab nationalism, comes to power in Egypt. Nasser fights against Muslim fundamentalist groups throughout his presidency.</p>	<p><b>1964:</b> Malcom X, a dedicated follower of Elijah Mohammad and the Nation of Islam, leaves the Nation of Islam and founds the Muslim Mosque Inc. and the Organization of Afro-American Unity.</p> <p>Sayyid Qutb publishes “Milestones,” which is widely regarded as a manifest of Islamic fundamentalism.</p> <p><b>1965:</b> Malcom X is assassinated.</p> <p><b>1967:</b> Six Day War between Israel and Arab states.</p>	<p><b>1979:</b> The Iranian Revolution and the influence of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini combines the religious and political authority of Islam, which is sometimes referred to as Islamism or political Islam.</p> <p>Muslim radicals occupy the holiest shrine of Islam in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, protesting the monarchy, which they regarded as an un-Islamic system of governance.</p>	<p><b>1979-1989:</b> The war for the liberation of Afghanistan forms an unlikely alliance between the U.S. and fundamentalists such as Osama bin Laden.</p> <p><b>1980:</b> The Iran-Iraq War begins.</p> <p><b>1987:</b> The first Palestinian intifada against Israel begins.</p> <p><b>1989:</b> A military coup brings fundamentalists led by Hasan al-Turabi to power in Sudan. Sudan and Iran are the only states in which politically motivated fundamentalists come to power.</p> <p>Ayatollah Khomeini calls for the death of Salman Rushdie, whose book “The Satanic Verses” is considered by many Muslims to be an irreverent attack on Islam.</p>	<p><b>1990s:</b> Al-Qaida emerges.</p> <p>Afghanistan becomes ruled by the Taliban.</p> <p>An Islamist party earns a majority of parliamentary votes in Algeria after free elections. The government dissolves the group, and the country slides into civil war.</p> <p><b>1993:</b> Muslim extremists detonate a truck filled with explosives at the World Trade Center.</p> <p>Israel and the Palestinians sign the Oslo accords to further the peace process.</p>	<p><b>2000:</b> The second Palestinian intifada begins.</p> <p><b>2001:</b> Muslim extremists attack the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.</p> <p><b>2003:</b> The war in Iraq begins.</p> <p><b>2005:</b> Palestinian and Iraqi elections are held. Syria withdraws its troops from Lebanon.</p>

Graphic by JOCELYN BILTGEN and ANDREA BLANK/Missourian  
Sources: wikipedia.com, barkati.net, World Almanac