

Digging Deeper XII: The Middle East, Islam, the West

Since July 2004 United for Peace of Pierce County has been conducting “Digging Deeper,” a Monday night book discussion group, often in the form of a study circle. Topics have included peak oil, climate change, and the corporation, as well as abiding themes of war, peace, and social change. Continuing in this tradition, on November 28, 2005, *Digging Deeper XII* will begin a four-week study circle examining four contrasting works, the study of which should improve our ability to understand: **Why are Western countries so deeply involved in the Middle East?**

- **Richard Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (Columbia University Press, 2004).** *Publishers Weekly*: “Bulliet, a history professor at Columbia University and a former director of the Middle East Institute, offers a short, insightful book about Islam and Muslims that actually provides hope for the future. The book consists of four essays arguing that Islam and Christianity have tremendous common roots and history—as much as, or more than, Christianity and Judaism. Bulliet also contends that Western Christian policymakers and commentators, when encountering Islam, have reacted with knee-jerk Islamophobia and generalizations rather than thoughtfulness. Bulliet envisions a future, 20 years off at least, where Islamic countries will have active democracies. He also debunks the popular view that Islam has an inherent separation of church and state problem; Christians have had similar issues in the past, as he shows with the Church of England and other examples. Bulliet's optimism—which is backed up by solid arguments—is alluring, particularly where his counterparts can offer only gloom-and-doom scenarios. Bulliet's most brilliant insight, which comes in the last chapter, is the recognition that those Islamic movements on the fringe eventually become the center of Islam. . . . Although portions are written densely, this book is a quick, informative, and encouraging read.”
- **Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Harper Perennial, 2003 paperback; orig. ed. 2001).** *Publishers Weekly*: “In the fields of Islamic and Middle Eastern history, few people are as prominent and prolific as Lewis, emeritus professor at Princeton. This time around, however, he has written a book with an inconsistent argument and an erratic narrative consisting of recycled themes from his earlier books, a work that sheds no new light on Middle Eastern history or on the events of September 11. His general argument is that Islamic civilization, once flourishing and tolerant, has in modern times become stagnant. . . . [T]he book raises more questions than it answers. . . . Lewis's earlier books, such as *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* and *The Middle East and the West*, are much more useful for anyone seeking to understand the historical dynamic between these two parts of the world.”
- **George Packer, *The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005).** *Publishers Weekly*: “George Packer's book . . . rests on three main pillars: analysis of the intellectual origins of the Iraq war, summary of the political argument that preceded and then led to it, and firsthand description of the consequences on the ground. In each capacity, Packer shows himself once more to be the best chronicler . . . that the conflict has produced. . . . Packer has a genuine instinct for what the Iraqi people have endured and are enduring, and writes with admirable empathy. His own opinions are neither suppressed nor intrusive: he clearly welcomes the end of Saddam while having serious doubts about the wisdom of the war, and he continually tests himself against experience. . . . The Iraq debate has long needed someone who is both tough-minded enough, and sufficiently sensitive, to register all its complexities. In George Packer's work, this need is answered.”
- **Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979; orig. ed. 1978).** Jim Dexheimer, Western Michigan University: “Many scholars place the beginning of postcolonial studies in history, literature, philosophy, anthropology, and the arts at the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978. Said focuses his attention in this work on the interplay between the ‘Occident’ and the ‘Orient.’ The Occident is his term for the West (England, France, and the United States), and the Orient is the term for the romantic and misunderstood Middle East and Far East. According to Said, the West has created a dichotomy, between the reality of the East and the romantic notion of the ‘Orient.’ The Middle East and Asia are viewed with prejudice and racism. They are backward and unaware of their own history and culture. To fill this void, the West has created a culture, history, and future promise for them. On this framework rests not only the study of the Orient, but also the political imperialism of Europe in the East.”

MEETING SCHEDULE — Mondays from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on November 28 and December 5, 12, & 19 at the Mandolin Café, 3923 South 12th St., Tacoma, WA.

Some books are available for borrowing or purchase; there is no charge for participation. Contact Mark Jensen at jensenmk@plu.edu or 253-756-7519, or Ted Nation at tedn5@yahoo.com or 253-983-8997.