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# We Too Sing America: South Asian, Arab, Muslim, And Sikh Immigrants Shape Our Multiracial Future



## Synopsis

Many of us can recall the targeting of South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Sikh people in the wake of 9/11. We may be less aware, however, of the ongoing racism directed against these groups in the past decade and a half. In *We Too Sing America*, nationally renowned activist Deepa Iyer catalogs recent racial flashpoints, from the 2012 massacre at the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, to the violent opposition to the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and to the Park 51 Community Center in Lower Manhattan. Iyer asks whether hate crimes should be considered domestic terrorism and explores the role of the state in perpetuating racism through detentions, national registration programs, police profiling, and constant surveillance. She looks at topics including Islamophobia in the Bible Belt; the 'Bermuda Triangle' of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim hysteria; and the energy of new reform movements, including those of undocumented and unafraid youth and Black Lives Matter. In a book that reframes the discussion of race in America, a brilliant young activist provides ideas from the front lines of post-9/11 America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I thought Deepa Iyer's new book, *We Too Sing America: South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Sikh Immigrants Shape Our Multiracial Future*, would be about positive and jarring cultural contributions from immigrants, how their literature, music, myths, cooking, clothing, and cultural practices are merging with and influencing wider U.S. culture. I think that would be a good book. Maybe

someone's written it. This, too, is a good book, and I recommend it. But it is mostly about the all-too-familiar story of post-9/11 prejudice, racism, violence, and police profiling and abuse, with a particular focus on South Asians. As an opponent of murder in any form, my first response to this topic is usually: Take the guns away! Hatred doesn't kill people -- hatred in people with guns kills people! But of course I'd love to take the hatred away as well and get the gun deaths down to accidents, suicides, and non-hate crimes. I admit some uncertainty as to how we can identify a gun murder as free of hate. Here's how Iyer describes hate crimes: "Hate violence affects everyone in America. A hate crime affects not only the person being targeted but the entire community to which that person belongs. Acts of hate violence can disrupt and affect even those who do not belong [to] the community being directly targeted, as we witnessed in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, where non-Sikhs also experienced fear and anxiety in the wake of the massacre." Of course, that sounds almost identical to the effects of a non-hate school shooting. A value to be found in distinguishing crimes motivated by, for example, hatred of Muslims, lies in the consequent ability to report on and know how widespread that phenomenon is. Does badmouthing Muslims encourage shooting them? Does shooting them encourage discriminating against them? We cannot study and address these matters if we don't identify them. And of course, fearing being shot for living in a country whose government has been purchased by the NRA, is not exactly the same as fearing being shot for being a Muslim and living in a country whose government has been purchased by the NRA. Hatred of part of your identity can make you want to hide that identity and/or resent the suggestion that you should do so and/or internalize the idea of inferiority, etc. On the other hand, hate crimes laws don't just produce data. Neither do they do anything to reduce racism or other bigotry or to address underlying insecurities and grievances. What they do, as Iyer points out, is increase long sentences in the U.S. mass incarceration system. Much of the work that Iyer describes being undertaken by community groups in support of abused minorities and crime victims involves attempting to tweak the flood of sewage spewing forth from the corporate media. She urges reporters not to talk about non-Muslim people having been mistaken for Muslims when they've been attacked. Her reason is that this could be taken to imply that it's all right to attack Muslims. That sounds crazy, but of course she is right that that could happen. Why, then, does locking people up for additional years or decades because they killed while racist not risk implying that it's OK to kill while not racist? It seems no more crazy. The permanent U.S. war on the Middle East has fed the streams of both private and police hate crimes, and that war has trained many to believe that, in fact, it is OK to kill only while believing in racism and bigotry. Members of the military cannot avoid thinking that, while killing was wrong all through their childhood, something has suddenly made it acceptable when they are ordered to

engage in it. For many the dehumanizing tactic that allows them to obey their orders is racism. Such racism at home, Iyer argues, enables the United States to keep going to war. And what about the endless FBI frame-ups, the profiling, the deportations, and all the racist abuse by "law enforcement" -- why aren't these hate crimes? Don't they set examples and influence the broader culture? If someone in Germany proposes immigration policies resembling those of the United States they are immediately denounced for racism and hatred. Iyer's book is full of heart-wrenching stories of raging racist hatred and violence, and the suffering it creates. She also proposes some good ideas rarely heard about in the corporate media, including reparations for the victims of post-9/11 state bigotry, on the model of reparations for the victims of the Japanese-American internment camps. What really breaks my heart in reading so many accounts of the sort of nastiness that has just helped lead that young man whose school clock project was labeled a bomb to leave the United States for someplace less hostile, is the focus of the corrective work on trying to influence the corporate media. We all know how awful the corporate media is, how little it is turned into a force for good, and what minor partial tweaks are proclaimed as victories by activists. We need a communications system that ceases to condone hatred or violence, that includes all voices in its communications, and that condemns cruelty -- whether public or private -- without exception.

Deepa Iyer's gem of a book narrates how Muslim, South Asian, and Middle Eastern communities have resisted profiling and Islamophobia since 9/11. Through the stories of Sikhs who suffered violence and horrific loss then turned to activism, Muslims who organize in their communities in the face of tremendous possible risk, and activists who stand in solidarity with other communities of color, Iyer has ensured that this book is not an exercise in academia or ivory tower research. It is a testament to the strength and stories of communities who continue to struggle for change. *We Too Sing America* is a moving and timely book. A must read.

Deepa Iyer puts fantastic spotlights on individuals and communities across America who are actively pursuing the more perfect Union our country should represent. She shares truthful histories of tragedy and triumph, and brilliantly discusses how modern everyday South Asians, Arabs, Muslims, and Sikhs can transform American realities. There is no single approach for success, and Ms. Iyer explores the complexities of causes, identity, and activism that all of us as "brown folks" (my term, not hers) encounter. I'm fired up and eager to engage in more social justice movements after reading this.

Essential and accessible reading for anyone who cares about our Constitution, the state of our Union, and humanity. A chronicle of injustices by individuals and the state since 9/11 based on individuals' race, ethnicity, and faith; and prescriptions for bringing about true equity, which will not come about simply because of our Nation's imminent multiracial population, and which affects all of us. Iyer's elegantly written stories of South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Sikh people on the front lines before and since 9/11 will in turns make you angry, sad, inspired, and hopeful. Highly recommend.

This book really helped me understand the history and continuing reality of personal and structural discrimination against South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Sikh people in the U.S. Deepa Iyer's combination of historical fact (e.g. U.S. security and immigration policies) and their intersections in real people's lives made for a powerful call to action on behalf of all concerned parties to organize for justice. I felt both educated and impassioned with a sense of urgency to take steps to defeat white supremacy, although it benefits me personally, to ensure a safe and prosperous environment for everyone in our community.

Deepa Iyer's book, *We Too Sing America* is the best book for better, comprehensive, and more nuanced understandings underscored by important solid qualitative and quantitative data, on South Asian, Arab, Muslim and Sikh immigrants and how these great American populations must be included in our thoughts, policies, actions, and empathies if we are to achieve American aspirations such as equality, equity, freedom, and truly value the greatness of these individuals and cultures to our own professional, community, and personal lives.

**BRAVO!** Words cannot describe how much I appreciate Deepa Iyer's perspective in these strange times we live in post-9/11. Her ability to balance the legal issues with the human element are spot on. Thank you, Ms. Iyer for being a vigilant community advocate and for spreading these vital accounting to the broader world. Ms. Iyer, you are correct, this is not just a Muslim, Sikh, or Arab issue but a narrative of inclusion and unity.

I received this as a gift from my friend and author Deepa. What a great work! If anyone wants to understand the struggles of minorities in America then this is a great book to get you started.

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