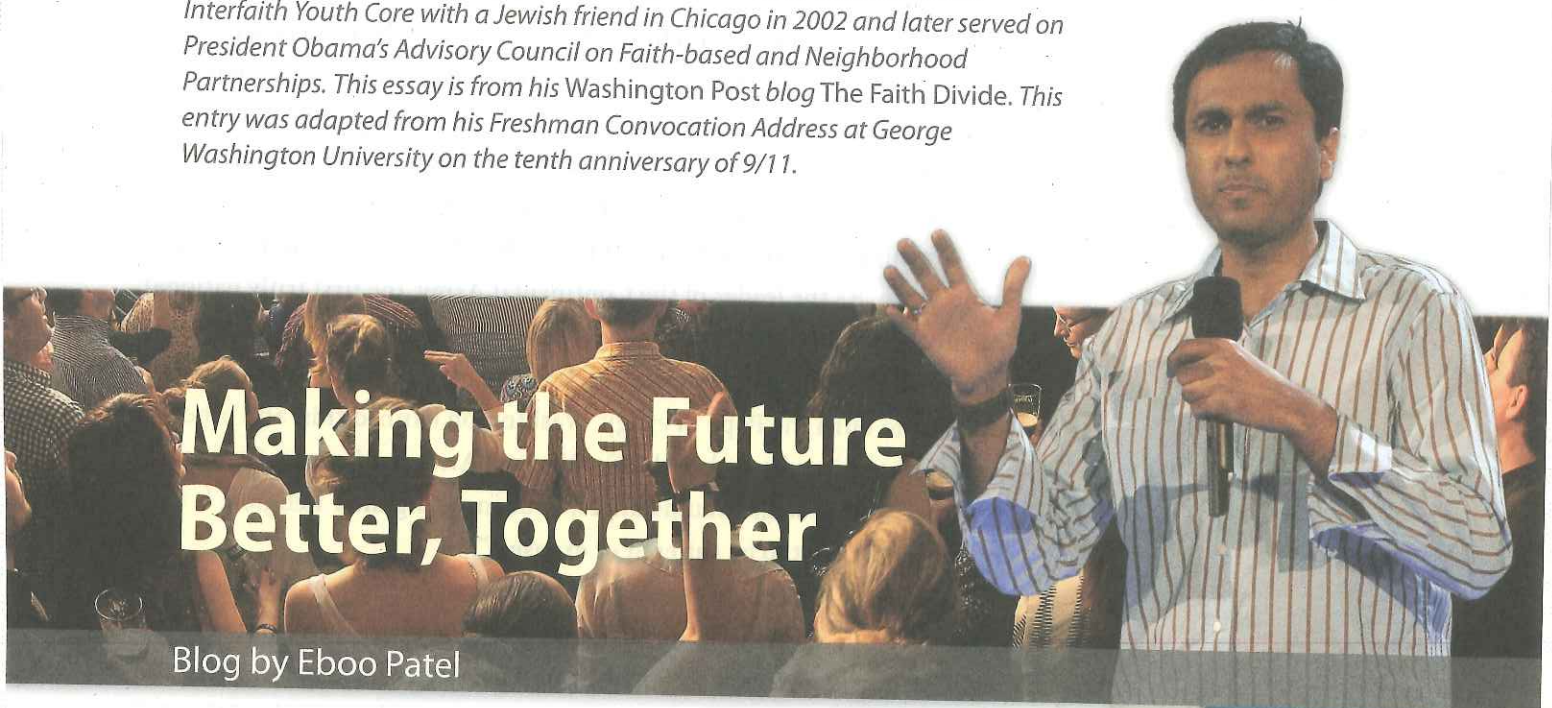
Background **Eboo Patel** *believes that religion should bring people together. Inspired by both his Muslim faith and his Indian heritage, he founded the Interfaith Youth Core with a Jewish friend in Chicago in 2002 and later served on President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. This essay is from his* Washington Post *blog* The Faith Divide. *This entry was adapted from his Freshman Convocation Address at George Washington University on the tenth anniversary of 9/11.*



Making the Future Better, Together

Blog by Eboo Patel

CLOSE READ Notes

1. **READ** As you read lines 1–21, begin to collect and cite text evidence.
   - Underline the two situations Patel is comparing.
   - Circle the words Patel thinks define the "essence of our nation."

I thought about George Washington when I was at the airport this weekend, watching women in Islamic headscarves brave the stares and scowls of some of their fellow Americans on an anniversary no one will ever forget.

I wonder if a similar feeling prompted Moses Sessius, the leader of the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island to write George Washington a letter shortly after he assumed the Presidency. It was a letter essentially asking whether Sessius and his people—Jews—would be safe in this new nation, or if they would be hounded and hated, blamed for crimes they did not commit.

In his response, Washington put on paper words that I think still define the essence of our nation:

"The Government of the United States . . . gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should ***demean*** *themselves as good citizens."*

demean:

CLOSE READ
Notes

In this new nation, the new president was saying, people would have their identities respected, their freedoms protected, their safety secured. They would be encouraged to cultivate good relationships with fellow citizens from other backgrounds, no matter the tensions and conflicts in the lands from which they came. And they would be invited—and expected—to contribute to the common good of their country.

Washington came to his views through both principle and practical experience. As the leader of the Continental Army, the first truly national institution, Washington recognized he was going to need the contributions of all willing groups in America. Back then, it was a common anti-Catholic practice to burn the Pope in effigy. Washington banned this, and other anti-Catholic insults within the Continental Army, and wrote: "At such a juncture, and in such circumstances, to be insulting their Religion, is so monstrous, as not to be suffered or excused."

Washington brought this ethic to his private life. When seeking a carpenter and a bricklayer for his Mount Vernon estate, he remarked: "If they are good workmen, they may be of Asia, Africa, or Europe. They may be Mohometans,[1] Jews or Christians of any Sect, or they may be Atheists." What mattered is what they could build.

Wars between clans and tribes, tension between sects and groups, prejudice directed at religion or nationality—those were the problems of past centuries. And whether you are reading the news about Somalia or Libya or Europe or Oklahoma, those are the problems of our time.

[1] **Mohometans:** another term for Muslims.

2. ◀ REREAD Reread lines 1–21. Explain how starting his article with George Washington's views on bigotry helps establish Patel's point of view. Support your answer with explicit textual evidence.

3. READ ▶ As you read lines 22–45, underline the details that explain Washington's reasoning.

CLOSE READ Notes

Washington wanted America to stand for something different: not the old idea that we are better apart, but the high hope that people from the four corners of the earth could do remarkable things together, even build a nation, and show humanity that we are better together. Respect, relationship and service to the common good—that was Washington's ethic, the three pillars on which he believed a diverse democracy would thrive.

In a too-seldom read sermon called "Remaining Awake Through A Great Revolution," Martin Luther King Jr. summarized the story of Rip Van Winkle. He mentioned the details we all know—old man goes up the mountain, falls asleep for many years, grows a long beard. But King pauses on one detail we might have passed over: When Rip Van Winkle went up the mountain, he passed an Inn with a picture of King George III, the English monarch. When he came down the mountain some years later, the Inn was still there, but the picture had changed: it was now of George Washington. America had gone from living under a dictator to living in a democracy.

What strikes me about King's use of George Washington as a symbol of democracy is that King's great-great grandparents could well have been owned by General Washington. The man who welcomed Jews and Catholics into the nation, the man who spoke of a government that gave bigotry no sanction and persecution no assistance, he was a slaveholder.

4. **REREAD** Reread lines 39–45. Explain how the author supports his opinion about Washington's view of people's freedom and identity. Support your answer with explicit textual evidence.

5. **READ** As you read lines 46–64, explain King's outlook for America in the margin.

CLOSE READ
Notes

cynical:

King knew this. But it neither paralyzed him nor made him **cynical.** He didn't tie himself into knots trying to untie that mother of all contradictions. Instead, he committed himself, body and soul, to shaping the future.

America's genius is to give its diversity of citizens a stake in the well-being of the nation. That's what keeps us facing forward, seeking inspiration from the past when possible, correcting mistakes when necessary. This nation could well have been a house divided, but today we stand as one—and that has everything to do with how a previous generation, led by
70 Abraham Lincoln, acted. This nation could easily have been declared a lie by an entire race of people—kidnapped and enslaved, separated out and hunted down. Instead King and his movement termed it a broken promise, one that the people on the receiving end of the breach took actions to mend.

As a nation, we've spent the last several weeks trying to decipher the meaning of 9/11. That's as it should be; those who were lost on that day deserve that and much much more.

As I looked out at the Freshman Class at George Washington University on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11, they represented for me the next ten years, and the decades after. Here was my message to them:

6. ◀ REREAD Reread lines 46–64. What point about change was Martin Luther King, Jr. making by telling the story of Rip Van Winkle? Support your answer with explicit textual evidence.

CLOSE READ
Notes

"When you serve, you are part of the future."

Yes, be a part of the conversation, but more importantly, take part in action. Don't forget, the people who talk for a living talk about the people who act.

For sure, ask big questions; but also make deep commitments—to your faith or philosophy, to the nation and the world, to the earth and to each other.

Debate the meaning of the events of past decades and centuries, but above all, shape the arc of the future.

When you serve, you are part of the future. When you dream, you are part of the future. When you build bridges that show we are better together you lower the barriers that make people believe we are better apart.

7. READ ▶ As you read lines 65–87, continue to cite textual evidence.
   - Underline the claims Patel makes.
   - Circle the evidence he gives to support his claims.
   - In the margin, explain what Patel is asking the Freshman Class at George Washington University to do.

8. READ ▶ As you read lines 88–97, underline Patel's advice for students and their futures.

CLOSE READ
Notes

When you are wronged, in ways both small and large, remember what Martin Luther King Jr. said in the waning days of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, after the African-Americans of that city had endured a year of walking to work, of facing false arrests and very real death threats, King gave a speech about looking forward, about building the nation: "Now is the time for redemption, now is the time for reconciliation, now is the time to build the beloved community."

9. **REREAD AND DISCUSS** Reread lines 80–97. In the margin of lines 91–97, summarize King's hopes. Then, with a small group, discuss the kind of world Patel envisions for the future.

SHORT RESPONSE

Cite Text Evidence Explain whether or not Patel convinced you that the United States is a nation that cherishes its diversity. Review your reading notes, and evaluate the effectiveness of the examples and evidence. Be sure to **cite text evidence** from the blog in your response.