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

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.”
Washington's reasoning: 3. READ

1. Homogeneous—another term for Muslims

Libya or the death of Okhlahoma. Those are the problems of our time.

Based on what you're reading the news about Somalia or

Waar's between classes and attitudes, race, religion, beliefs, and groups.

What matters is when they could build.

be Mozambique? Jews or Christians or any sect, or they may be Atheists. They are good workers, they may be of Asian, Azliz, or European. They may

Carpetbank and a bankroller for his Mount Vernon estate to impressed.

Washington bought this estate to his political life. When seeking a

moisture, and in such circumstances, to be insults their religion, is so

Joule, and in such circumstances, to be insults their religion, is so

anti-Catholic instincts within the Constitutional Army, and worse. In such a

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of all the big groups in America. Back then, it was a common anti-Catholic

experience. As the leader of the Constitutional Army, the first truly national

Washington came to his views through both principle and practical

expected—to contribute to the common good of their country

and the hands from which they came. And they would be invited—and

citizens from other backgrounds, on matter the tensions and conflicts in

They would be encouraged to cultivate good relationships with fellow,

their identities respected, their freedoms protected, their safety secured.

In this new nation, the new president was saying, people would have
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.


5. **Read** As you read lines 46–64, explain King’s outlook for America in the margin.
and the decades after. Here was my message to them:

on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11, they represented for me the next ten years,

As I looked out at the freshman class at George Washington University

deserve their much more.

meaning of 9/11. There as it should be; those who were lost on that day

As a nation, we've spent the last several weeks trying to decipher the
one that the people on the receiving end of the threat look actions to need

united down. United, King and his movement formed. It's a broken promise,

by an entire race of people—Killed and imprisoned, separated out and

Abraham Lincoln said, "This nation could easily have been declared a He

and that has everything to do with how a previous generation led by

nation could well have been a house divided, but today we stand as one—

nation from the past who possible, corrected mistakes, and necessary. This

point of the nation. That's when keeps us staying forward, seeking inspiration

America's genius is to give us diversity of citizens a stake in the well

the United

contradictions. Instead, the committed himself, body and soul, to shaping

dt him virtually into knowing try to make that matter of all

King knew this. But it neither paralyzed him nor made him cynical. He
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.
Kind of world Pearl envisions for the future.

91-97, summarize King’s hope. Then, with a small group, discuss the

READ LINE 90-97. IN THE MARGIN OF LINES

Build the beloved community.

Line for redemption; now is the time for reconciliation. Now is the time to

give a speech about looking forward, about building the nation. Now is the

walking to work. The history of race and very real death threats. King

 boycott, after the African-Americans of that city had endured a year of

Martin Luthur King Jr. faced in the waging days of the Montgomery bus

When you are wronged, in ways both small and large, remember what