

Perspectives like mine are rarely heard when discussing the Middle East. I am an atheist, a black American, a woman, and an avid supporter of secularism. The migrant crisis in Europe, particularly the friction between European secularists and Muslim migrants/refugees, has shown that nonreligious and religious people can no longer ignore each other's beliefs or lack thereof. The need for coexistence and mutual respect between atheists, like myself, and religious populations, especially Muslims, is growing increasingly important as globalization continues. Therefore to truly support a unified international community, groups that support interfaith learning must also be open to those who have no faith or those who question faith.

Fostering interfaith communication and understanding, as well as communication and understanding between nonreligious and religious people, is critically important in the Middle East and the in the West. After Ibrahim, I hope to foster constructive discussions about religion and culture within my Roosevelt House courses and JFEW internships. The skills that I would cultivate this summer would serve as a basis for interfaith and intercultural discussion and learning, which will be a staple in my undergraduate and graduate research.

Roosevelt House, the School of Human Rights and Public Policy at Hunter, strongly encourages student participation in public programs. The House attracts a very diverse group of students, many activists, with strong beliefs. In many of my human rights and politics courses, students have gotten into heated debates about topics regarding the Middle East ranging from the Israel-Palestine conflict to US foreign policy to Islamic terrorism. Even in a School of Human Rights, highly-educated students fall into traps of sociocultural dichotomies and identity politics. The tensions and anger I see within my school are representative of the tensions that exist in the international community at large. I am extremely interested in creating and hosting events on interfaith and intercultural communication, particularly on the intersection of culture and religiosity. I believe that Ibrahim could give me the tools to better address religious and cultural tensions that exist within the microcosm of Roosevelt House and the macrocosm of the international community.

I also plan on incorporating what I learn on Ibrahim into my academic pursuits. Currently, I am planning my senior political science thesis. I am researching women's political mobilization in the post-Arab Spring Middle East. I am planning on attending graduate school immediately after I obtain my BA. I will pursue a MA in International Affairs or a MPA. My regional specialization in graduate school will be the Middle East. While my research will be extensive, there is so much that cannot be learned from news articles, books, or lectures. It is vital that I have extensive experience in the region, which Ibrahim can provide me. I truly believe that there is no substitute for experiential learning. Semester at Sea provided me with experiential learning and field work experiences that completely changed my life. I believe that the Ibrahim Program would have an even more profound affect by introducing me to a region that is engrossing, fascinating, and perplexing.

After graduate school, I am extremely interested in pursuing a career in diplomacy. Madeleine Albright said in regards to faith and diplomacy, "If diplomacy is the art of persuading others to act as we would wish, effective foreign policy requires that we comprehend why others act as they do." The lessons of the Iraq War are clear: without a firm grasp of the history, culture, religion, social traditions, and language of a people, foreign policy is useless. Between the rise of American Millennials whose lives have been shaped by a series of foreign policy

blunders and the Middle Eastern youth bulge coming of age, the US and MENA region are poised for change.

I truly believe that the next 30 years could bring a dramatic shift in US-Middle Eastern relations for the better. Ibrahim is unique in that the program will allow me to see the Middle East through lenses of understanding and intercultural/interfaith growth. The experiential learning provided by Ibrahim this summer would give me the foundational knowledge necessary to become a change-agent and leader in my academic, professional, and personal lives.

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