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If Islam was a vaguely known foreign religion to the average American before September 11, the cataclysmic events involving Muslims and Muslim countries since that tragic event have turned it into the enemy's religion. Appreciation for Islam, even among educated Americans, has suffered a severe setback because of the terrorist act of September 11 and the subsequent war on terrorism launched by the Bush Administration. The dominant impression that the Western media give of Islam is one of backwardness, violence, madness, irrationality, intolerance, anti-Semitism, and anti-Westernism.

This sourcebook counters this image by providing a collection of translated works of fifty-two liberal Muslim thinkers of the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. The book is also the natural extension of Charles Kurzman's earlier work, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (Oxford University Press, 1998). In his previous book, Kurzman covered the writings of Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century, mostly those of post-WWII. In *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, he again draws on an impressively broad array of writings in different languages and national contexts. His selections are excellent, and the translations of non-English texts are often clearer than the original. This selection includes a variety of scholarly and non-scholarly works searching for a religious grounding of issues of modern concern in traditional Islamic texts and traditions. The editor's biographical introductions to the pieces help to better ground the authors' writings in their historical contexts.

The book offers English readers a rich selection of examples of complexity and diversity within a religion too often depicted as sterile, narrow, and dogmatic. These pieces demonstrate that modern thinking is not alien to Muslim intellectuals. They have been grappling with issues of democracy, scientific progress, separation of church and state, women's and minority rights, freedom of thought, and societal progress for over a century. Kurzman's selection shows
that Islam is not a static belief system lacking vitality. It contains multiple meanings for believers in different times and places. These intellectual works reflect a more pragmatic and pluralistic approach to Islamic thought, law, and traditions, compared with totalistic and fundamentalist approaches. More importantly, modern views are limited neither to social issues and philosophical thoughts nor Muslims in the Arab world. They are found in all regions and in all aspects of religious thought and practice. The selection offered in this book covers the five themes of cultural revival, political reform, religious interpretation (of Sharia), science and education, and women's rights. The Muslim authors of these works represent countries from Africa (Egypt, Tunisia, Kenya, South Africa, Algeria), the Middle East (Iran, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Iraq), Russia and Central Asia (Crimea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Tatarstan), and South Asia (India, Malabar, Bengal, Pakistan, Singapore, Java, Indonesia, China, and Afghanistan).

The task of modernist Muslims has not been an easy one. They have had to compete with both traditional clerics and secular intellectuals, while fighting off political suppression by the state. As Kurzman notes in his excellent introduction, the ulama wield enormous authority, especially where political mobilization of a less-educated public is in order. A close reading of these texts shows that traditional ulama often show a unity of action and thought that is rarely found among modernist Muslim intellectuals. The latter disagree among themselves more than do traditional Islamic scholars. They often lack a fixed or unified view of even the most basic religious tenants. Their interpretation of Quranic verses and Islamic traditions remains more fluid and subject to the historical and national conditions in which these Muslim thinkers find themselves. Their courageous efforts in grappling with issues of modernity and Western ideologies, often in a very unfavorable intellectual and political environment, have been crippled by lack of unity among their own ranks.

Furthermore, modernist Muslims neither constitute the majority of Muslims nor are they able to generate the kind of political capital needed for mobilization of the larger public, even though that public may be agreeable to many of their views. The unfortunate predicament of modernist Muslims is that, despite a century of debate and mobilization, the traditional view often maintained the upper hand and Muslim societies are most often dominated by traditional clerical views. Even where there has been a glimpse of hope
for modernist Muslims, as in Iran, it turned out that the traditionalists could capture the prize and leave modernists in the cold. If pre-revolutionary mobilization against the Shah benefited from books of modernist laymen such as Ali Shariati, these same books were the first victims of clerical revolutionary zeal in a public burning in Isfahan's main square!

It is also important to remember that "modern" is not a fixed quality in the writings of these intellectuals. Each of these intellectuals has a different understanding of what is modern and how the issues associated with modernity are to be viewed. Modern is a term incapable of reflecting the ideological and theological nuances visible in the works of these intellectuals. What, in fact, allows for their incorporation in the category of modern is their more positive disposition toward the so-called modern concepts. True, these selections are representative of a more liberal understanding of Islamic texts, theology, and jurisprudence. However, these selections speak to different national audiences, are contextualized in different national/political contexts, and are in dialogue with different theological discourses in the language and nation of their origin. Reading these texts in a linear manner ignores their theoretical and practical grounding within different doctrines, outlooks, political interests, and national contexts. The diverse and contradictory nature of some of these interpretations should warn the reader of their cultural bond. In most cases, the diversity of views expressed is more the product of cultures with which Islam came into contact rather than inherent flexibility in the Islamic texts, as claimed by these modernist Muslim intellectuals. Furthermore, an evolutionary reading of the life and thoughts of some of these Muslim intellectuals covered here shows that their views on all issues and at all times have not been as modern as the selection reflects. Several of these modernists, like Afghani, Iqbal, and M. Abduh, retracted from their earlier views and became much more suspicious of Western concepts and constructs than they were in their earlier life.

Finally, it is true that modernist Islam, with its emphasis on modern rational thinking emanating from the Enlightenment, has emerged as a response to Western modernity. However, elements of such rational thinking were never absent in classical Islamic thought. Characteristic elements of modern Muslim thinking (rational interpretation of the Quran, contextuality of scriptural exegesis, diversity of human conditions, and even provisionality of knowledge) were well recognized in medieval Islamic traditions.
The rational element in Islam was celebrated by the Mutazilite (Ali-Kundi, Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd) who reached out to Greek philosophy for a better understanding of the Quran and a critical examination of Muslim thought. Seeking the latest developments in scientific thinking was a tradition among earlier Muslim scholars—a tradition often forgotten by the clerical establishment that developed since the sixteenth century.

This is an excellent sourcebook for English readers, and Kurzman should be commended for his effort. Although these original selections may not be as appealing to public readers as are commentaries on liberal Islam, they serve as a rich source of materials for scholars and students interested in learning about Islam and modern Muslim thinkers. It provides evidence against the prevalent stereotype of Islam as a static and monolithic religion. It shows that the Islamic community is no less pluralistic than its Western counterpart, and it is no less interested in engaging in dialogue and interaction with foreign ideas than the Westerners. The book also provides an opportunity to learn about Muslims and their thoughts through their own eyes. As such, this book is to be welcomed and warmly recommended.