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A CONVERSATION ON RELIGION WITH JON MEACHAM AND SALLY QUINN



EBOO PATEL

THE FAITH DIVIDE

Eboo Patel is founder and executive director of the [Interfaith Youth Core](#), a Chicago-based international nonprofit that promotes interfaith cooperation. His blog, *The Faith Divide*, explores what drives faiths apart and what brings them together. [more »](#)

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GUEST VOICES

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Tim Harrison | I've done my part to vilify those who disagree with me. Now it's time to put aside religious issues and solve larger issues.

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The New Veterans Movement

It's hard to categorize [Paul Rieckhoff](#). He listens to Metallica and Jay-Z. He grew up working class and went to Amherst. He's worked as an investment banker and a nonprofit director. He swears like a sailor and smiles like a little girl.

But the most interesting paradox is this: he was against the Iraq war from the beginning, and he still volunteered to go fight in it.

He describes it as a combination of a blue collar ethic of sacrifice for country, and a desire to be a leader in a place where his skills meant the difference between life and death.

He tells the whole story in his exceptional book, [Chasing Ghosts](#), which Chuck Palahniuk called, "The best reporting to come out of the Iraq war - possible the best reporting to emerge from any war."

Paul's prose punches you in the nose from the get go: "George Bush had better be f---ing right. That's how I began my journal on April 3, 2003."

There were places where I laughed out loud: "I didn't care what any Human Resources robot from Goldman Sachs tried to tell me, being a midlevel manager at an investment bank is not leadership. Bond traders telling rich people what to do with their money is not leadership."

And there were places where I shook my head in disgust: "I wanted weapons of mass destruction to exist in Iraq, because if they didn't, there would be hell to pay for us all. America's reputation would be irreparably damaged for generations."

I met Paul through the Prime Movers fellowship, which identifies and networks leaders of social movements. The group gathered at the Interfaith Youth Core offices in Chicago a few weeks ago, and Paul gave the morning presentation on the movement he is building, [Iraq and Afghan Veterans of America \(IAVA\)](#).

It's been a long time since I've been so impressed by a movement.

IAVA's immediate task is to effectively network and serve the horribly neglected community of veterans of our current wars, and it accomplishes that through everything from getting them free tickets to sporting events to playing a major role in passing the new GI Bill.

But Paul has a longer-term vision. The old veterans' organizations, like the VFW, are shrinking fast. Their membership is graying and dying, and their methodology (direct mail, for example) is firmly stuck in the 20th Century. Paul is hyper-aware that IAVA's web-based model, and its ability to use every form of media imaginable as a platform to advocate for veterans, is what today's veterans need.

And because today's veterans are often tomorrow's political and civic leaders, the IAVA and Paul Rieckhoff may well be creating a social movement that shapes American life for generations to come.

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POSTED BY EBOO PATEL ON OCTOBER 24, 2008 10:30 AM

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