

MUHAMMAD: LEGACY OF A PROPHET
The Life Story Of The Man Who Founded Islam And Changed The World
Premieres on PBS on Wednesday, December 18 at 9:00 PM

**Innovative documentary interweaves 7th century biography
with the lives of 21st century American Muslims
inspired and guided by Muhammad's example**

His father died before he was born, and his mother died when he was only six. But sheltered by a powerful uncle, he made a good start in life, established himself in a profitable business and married well. And then, at the age of 40, he was transformed. A man who could not read or write, he announced that he was the prophet of God.

His name was Muhammad, and in the next 23 years he would bring peace to the warring pagan tribes of Arabia and establish the new religion of Islam, which today has 1.2 billion followers.

Three years in the making, ***Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet***, which premieres Wednesday, December 18 at 9:00 p.m. on PBS (check local listings), travels in the footsteps of the prophet to the Arabian desert and the holy city of Mecca where much of Muhammad's story unfolded. "There are six to seven million Muslims here in America, where Islam is the country's fastest growing religion, but many Americans are completely unfamiliar with the life story of the remarkable man who founded this religion 1400 years ago," says producer/director Michael Schwarz.

This sweeping two-hour documentary goes well beyond the boundaries of the past. "Muhammad is 'history in the present tense,'" says co-creator/producer Michael Wolfe, a well-known Muslim author. "In it, we reflect on this 7th century story through the experiences of 21st century Americans who feel deeply connected to what Muhammad did, said and believed." A presentation of KQED/San Francisco, the documentary is produced by Kikim Media and Unity Productions Foundation. ***Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet*** was created and produced by Michael Wolfe and Alexander Kronemer, and produced and directed by Michael Schwarz. Noted actor André Braugher is the narrator.

With some of the world's greatest scholars on Islam providing historical context and critical perspective, ***Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet*** tells of intrigue and faith, revolutionary ideas and bitter persecution, brutal war and brilliant diplomacy in an arid

desert where tribal allegiance was often the only protection. Muhammad was orphaned as a child, but he was fortunate to be born into the powerful tribe of the Quraysh in the city of Mecca, a regional pilgrimage site and commercial crossroads. He became a successful trader based in this cosmopolitan center and married a woman who was a wealthy merchant. Yet as Muhammad prospered with the city, he saw that the poor were increasingly neglected and hedonism dominated the culture.

One day in the desert, while meditating in a mountain cave, Muhammad was struck by a revelation that changed his life and the world. Terrified by the force of the experience, he began to recite words that came to him, words he said were from God. These messages would continue throughout the rest of his life. Unable to write them, he would repeat them to his growing band of followers until they became part of their collective memory. Slowly these revelations began to form the book we now know as the Qur'an (or Koran). While people were shocked by these claims, "they acquired credibility because of the very nature of the words spoken," says M. Cherif Bassiouni, professor of law at DePaul University. How could an illiterate man make up language of such poetry and wisdom?

The new faith and ideas that Muhammad proclaimed as the Word of God, were a threat to the Meccan establishment. Muhammad's pronouncement that there was only one God, particularly threatened the very livelihood of the rich Meccans who profited from Mecca's role as Arabia's most popular pilgrimage center. Through years of harassment and deprivation, and trading sanctions imposed against his people, Muhammad continued to preach and share revelations with his followers, calling on them to worship one God, to destroy idols and to practice charity. As the community faced growing hostility, he began to encourage Muslims to move across the desert and settle in the oasis town of Yathrib, later called Medina. When word of an assassination plot reached him, Muhammad barely escaped death and managed to join the growing Islamic community in Medina.

"Unlike Jesus or the Buddha, who seem to have been purely spiritual leaders with no temporal responsibilities whatever, Muhammad found himself now head of state," author Karen Armstrong points out. "Having transferred the Muslim families from Mecca to Medina, he now had to make sure they could survive there." Muhammad proved to be a strategically gifted military leader and a creative diplomat in the turbulent period that followed. A series of bloody battles between the Meccans and Muhammad's followers almost destroyed the nascent faith, but then the tide turned. Ultimately

Muhammad was able to lead 100,000 Muslims back to Mecca for the Hajj, a pilgrimage that remains a cornerstone of the spiritual life of Muslims.

While recounting the story of Muhammad, a tale that was carefully passed down as oral history in the 7th century and subsequently recorded, the documentary also conveys what many American Muslims believe Islam teaches, and how their beliefs shape their lives. The documentary takes viewers into the homes, mosques and work places of some of America's Muslims to discover the many ways in which they follow Muhammad's example and interpret his life and his message today. Through these inter-linked narratives, the filmmakers connect past and present, prophet and follower, within an innovative film structure." Co-creator/producer Alex Kronemer says, "Many Muslims believe that if you want to understand who they are, the best place to start is with this story of Muhammad, because he established a model of behavior and values which Muslims strive to emulate today."

The American Muslims that the documentary introduces include recent immigrants, Muslims whose families have lived here for generations, and American converts like Kevin James, a Brooklyn fire marshal, who has a Jewish mother and a father who is Native American and African American.

"America is a racial nation," says James. "Either you're Black, you're White, you're Italian, you're Jewish, you're this, you're that. So coming from a mixed background, I've felt like, kind of in limbo." After a period of spiritual seeking, James discovered a kinship with Islam, in part because it shares religious roots with both Judaism and Christianity and in part because it preaches racial equity. His faith inspired his decision to become a firefighter he explains, "The Qur'an teaches you that the saving of one life is as if you've saved all of humanity."

A critical care nurse, Najah Bazy is a second generation Muslim American who lives in Dearborn, Michigan. Her hometown has seen a massive influx of Muslim immigration as a result of the Gulf War. As she helps her colleagues understand and work effectively with their Muslim patients and her husband negotiate life with a teenage daughter, Bazy says that Muhammad is her constant guide. "We live our lives through his examples, but he's not God," she explains. "Our reverence is to God. And our reference is to [Muhammad]. So how I walk, and how I speak, and how I carry myself, and how I treat my husband, and how I treat my mother and my father, and how I behave as a sister and a daughter and a nurse and a friend and a neighbor, that's all prophet Muhammad in action."

Although this documentary was well into production prior to 9/11, some of the American Muslim characters who help tell Muhammad's story were filmed after the attack. These sequences portray their reaction to this event, the aftermath they have experienced, and the controversial concept of jihad. Through a combination of commentary from Islamic experts and interviews with Muslim Americans, the program also addresses some of the difficult issues at the matrix of religious faith, cultural customs and Middle East politics, including women's rights and charges of anti-Semitism rooted in the historical conflicts of the 7th century.

FRONTLINE will rebroadcast *Muslims*, a two-hour special on the many diverse interpretations of Islam around the world, on Thursday, December 19 at 9:00 PM on PBS.

A variety of community-based events that use *Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet* and *Muslims* as a catalyst for dialogue about Islam are taking place around the country in conjunction with these broadcasts.

Visit www.pbs.org/muhammad for more information about *Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet*, including a "virtual Hajj," essays by program participants, transcripts and additional interview excerpts, an interactive timeline, as well as extra information and streaming video on Muhammad and women, violence, other religions, America and more.

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Kikim Media draws on 25 years of experience in print and broadcast journalism to engage, entertain and inform its audiences. Its productions are guided by a fundamental commitment to fairness and accuracy and by its abiding conviction that a true story, honestly told, can change people's lives. The company was founded in 1996 by Michael Schwarz, whose work has been honored by some of the most prestigious awards in broadcasting, including three national Emmy Awards, two George Foster Peabody Awards, and the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Journalism Award.

Unity Productions Foundation is a nonprofit production company whose mission is to develop balanced, fair and accurate journalistic material concerning the world's cultural and spiritual traditions in order to help increase understanding and tolerance.

KQED operates **KQED Public Television 9**, the nation's most-watched public television station, and **Digital Television 9**, Northern California's only public television digital signal; **KQED Public Radio 88.5 FM**, the most-listened-to public radio station in the nation; the **KQED Education Network**, which brings the impact of KQED to thousands of teachers, students, parents and media professionals through workshops, seminars and resources; and www.kqed.org, which harnesses the power of the Internet to bring KQED to communities across the Web.

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