

The reluctant fundamentalist

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The Reluctant Fundamentalist, by Mohsin Hamid, follows the journey of its protagonist, Changez, who tells the story of his time in America from being a student to chasing his American dream to watching the demise of the nation he loved post 9/11. Initially Changez was compelled to adopt the identity of a New Yorker and threw himself into the culture that so readily accepted him. The events of September 11 shook the nation that Changez so strongly felt apart of and he began to watch the great nation slip into a “nostalgia”, one which would not accept him, at that point his identity as an American and more importantly a New Yorker is challenged and ultimately he no longer desires to be an American. Changez toward the end of his journey in America rediscovers his Pakistani identity which he finally ends up returning after the words of Juan Bautista which send him into “deep introspection” and lead him back to his roots in Lahore. Throughout the course of his journey Changez goes through many events which ultimately shape his identity. For Changez, New York was a window of opportunity. The culture of New York city with its “cosmopolitan” feel immediately accepted Changez, he loved the city he somewhat adopted to be his new home, he so easily settled in as there were many comforts from Pakistan in arms reach “.....” and many Pakistani cab drivers in which he would speak Urdu to. He graduated, without a single B, from Ivy League University, Princeton. It was at Princeton that he realised the potential New York could offer him, “this is a dream come true...” and that his desire for the American dream was perhaps achievable. At Princeton he is surrounded by people who he is in awe of and inspired by “...titans in their fields.” He relishes in the environment which is based on merit. After graduating from Princeton Changez is sought after and

is employed by a prestigious, boutique valuation firm, Underwood Samson. For Changez Underwood Samson holds the key to unlocking the desired professional success he aspires for in America, a significant part of his American dream. Through Underwood Samson Hamid has created strong parallels between it and The United States' economic and financial power within the world. With his initial acceptance into New York Changez is able to fully immerse himself in the ways of a New Yorker and ultimately discover his identity as a New Yorker. In going back to Pakistan, Changez realizes that he has adopted an 'American' sense of superiority and condescension; he feels like a 'traitor' whose continued loyalty to the United States prevents him from protecting his own people. Consequently, he comes to revile the 'American' aspects of his identity " I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner.. that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed me..." His refusal to shave off his beard upon departure from Pakistan indicates a desire to assert his 'Pakistaniness' and his loyalty to his homeland. It is an act of self-definition, a 'symbol' of his Muslim identity, as well as one of defiance and self-differentiation. Changez pursuit of Ericas love creates a denial of his own culture