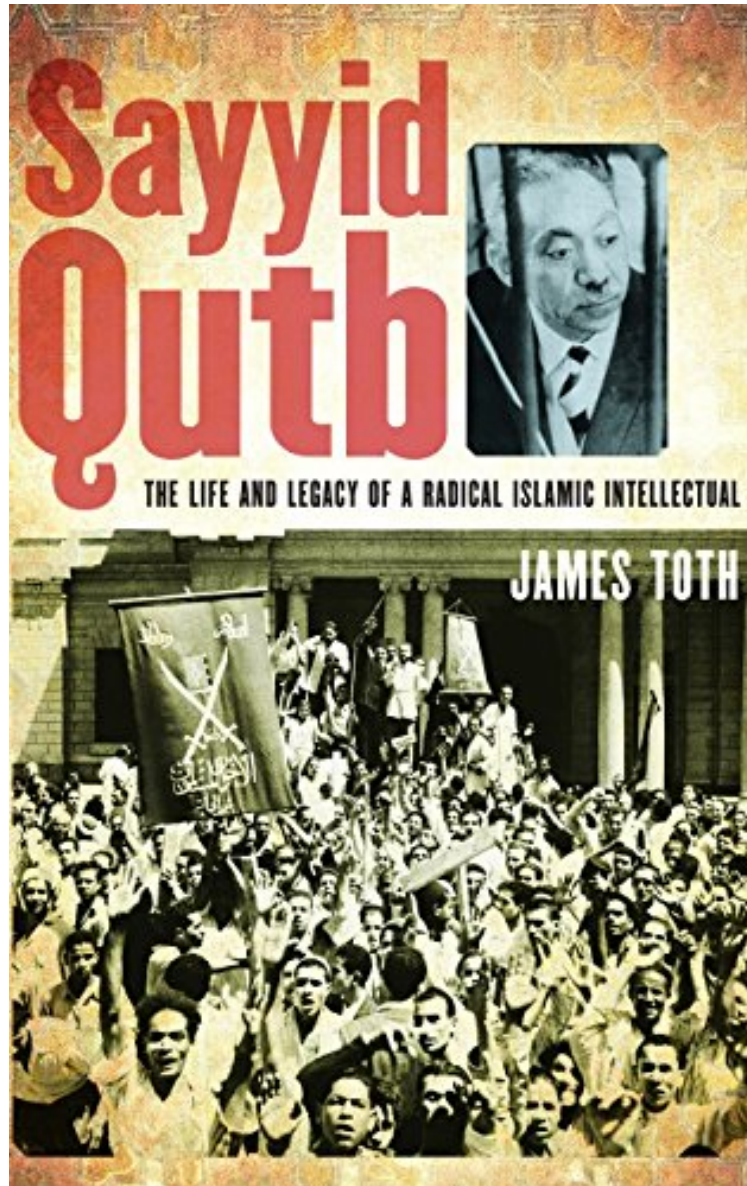


(Download) Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual

## Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual

*James Toth*

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#235157 in Books James Toth 2013-04-04Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 6.50 x 1.30 x 9.30l, 1.40 #File Name: 0199790884392 pagesSayyid Qutb The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual | File size: 69.Mb

**James Toth : Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interesting reading about Sunni salafism  
By Corricolari  
Good piece of research. A little repetitive and questionable in structure as a learning document, but very much worth the dedication to read it. It shows very well the extreme two faces of Sunni salafism, with its compassionate side towards the surrounding loyal poor country people (that also acts as a buying in, recruiting technique) and the call for violent action against jahilliya (infidels). Not clear why Qutb moves from secularist scholar to radicalism.  
10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Good, But Not the Place to Start  
By Bruce Epperson  
Sayyid Qutb has been demonized in the West as the intellectual father of radical jihad. Born in the early years of the twentieth century in a small town in south Egypt, he started as a poet, literary critic, and education bureaucrat, but became an erudite interpreter of the Koran. He spent 20 months in the United States, with the longest stretch at the now-University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. Upon his return he became involved with the Moslem Brotherhood, and after the killing of Colonel-President al-Nassar (Qutb was not involved) was imprisoned for most of a decade and executed in 1966. Another author, John Calvert, has written extensively about Qutb's life and his time in the States. But Calvert's book, which was at one time sold in the U.S. by Columbia University Press, appears now to only be available from its original British publisher. That's the problem. To avoid duplicating or appearing to plagiarize Calvert's book, Toth only spends about 80 pages discussing Qutb's biography. The remainder, 190 or so pages, is a very detailed discussion of his philosophies and theories. Unless one is well versed in Islamic sociology and is already familiar with Qutb's life, much of this book will go over your head. Addressing this book on its own terms, I do have a couple of concerns. Toth asserts that Qutb was moved towards radicalism by what he saw in his United States visit, but he does not discuss in detail what Qutb found disturbing, let alone radicalizing. He does not connect the dots. The Greeley was, in the early 1950s, a fairly quiet, conservative farm town, and the only specific that Toth gives as to Qutb's grievances is that the citizens did not seem to care much about a sense of community, spending more time taking care of their lawns than attending community and religious functions. Likewise, while the Egyptian prison system was (and is) notoriously bad, Toth does not explain what it is about the system that pushes inmates to radicalism in the direction of fundamentalist Islam as opposed to, say, Tudeh communism-Islam. Qutb's brand of Islam was notable for being an alternative to all of modernism. It existed in sort of a timeless idealized unchanging present lodged somewhere around 950 c.e. Even bleached of its radical action (i.e. violent) elements, one gets the impression that a westerized version would look something like the Old Order Amish or the Mennonites of central Kansas. While Toth mentions that there were other schools of Islamic thought that were not antithetical to modernism, he does not explain or contrast them to Qutb's timeless pre-modern utopianism. As a result, one is left wondering if there really was a practical alternative to Qutb's vision, or what it would look like. This somewhat defeats Toth's stated purpose, which is to make Islam three-dimensional to westerners and lay to rest the panic-mongering of the "they're coming, and they're gonna shove you back to the stone age" yellow journalists. The overall result is that Toth's book is rather static. It is a highly detailed explanation of what Qutb thought (and wrote, a preached), but it doesn't really explain the evolutionally process of how he got there or why. It does was the author set out to do, but I think he could have done it AND made it a useful stand-alone Qutb biography at the same time.  
8 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Intellectual or hate monger?  
By SInohey  
The author begins his book by the emphatic statement that "Sayyid Qutb was one of the most radical Islamist thinkers of the 20th century" whom Paul Berman, in turn, called "The Philosopher of Islamic Terror". These seemingly contradictory portrayals are both correct. Toth introduces his book that "aspires to make intellectual, political, and sociological sense of his ideas throughout his lifetime and afterward." Did he succeed? He partially did in my opinion but the treatise seemed more of an apologia of Qutb's life and overcompensation to balance the Orientalists' image of the man as "a diabolical genius behind terrorism." The 382 pages book is organized in two parts, an Appendix, Notes and a bibliography. It is more akin to a dissertation than a layman's book for popular consumption. Part One: contains 5 chapters that introduce the subject and proceed gradually from Qutb's early years in his birth village of Musha, in the Asyut Province of Upper Egypt, his primary and secondary education in the local school where only religious courses were studied. Qutb eventually moved to Cairo where he was exposed to a much broader education based on the British system, and eventually, enrolled in Dar Al Ulum (Teachers' College) from which he graduated in 1933. While in college he met Hassan El Bana, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (in 1928) who graduated one year ahead. The two men became friends and Qutb drifted from secularism to a moderate modernist Islam. As an adult, Qutb had a palpable disdain for Imams and their traditional method of education, manifested by his repeated conflicts with the Muslim establishment, which in turn banned his books from Al-Azhar University (the pre-eminent Islamic school in the world) declaring him "munharif", a deviant. He began his professional career as a poet, critic and a writer, producing 24 books in his lifetime. His first published novel was Ashwak (Thorns) received minor success. In 1939 he became a functionary of the Ministry of Education "Wizaret el Ma'arif". He mingled among the literati, intellectuals and influential politicians of his time. His writings such as "Social Justice in Islam" (1949), "The Battle between Islam and Capitalism" (1951) and "World Peace and Islam" (1951) became quite popular and were on the curricula of some schools. Qutb spent 20 months (1948-50) in the USA training in educational administration in Washington, D.C., Stanford University and Greeley Colorado and travelled widely across the States. He also visited several European cities during his return trip to Egypt. This journey exposed

Qutb to Western culture and was the catalyst of his revulsion of capitalist societies and his leanings towards Marxist/Leninist ideology. Part Two, about two thirds of the tome, divided into six chapters, deals entirely with Qutb's philosophy, teachings and his radicalization; his ideas of changing Egypt and the Muslim world, eradicating depravity and decadence, revitalizing Islamic culture and economy, ultimately culminating in a utopia of an Islamic Umma ruled justly by Sharia'a modeled on early Islamic history of the initial four Khalifas that succeeded the Prophet Mohamed. In the Appendix, Toth introduces the reader to several contemporary political, intellectual and religious personalities, such as Hassan Al Bana, Taha Hussain, Mohamed Rashid Rida and a few others. Included at the end of the book are three papers by Qutb on "Women and the Family", "People of the Book, Dhimmis" and "Apologetics". This recent biography is another attempt by a western writer (employed at NYU in Abu Dhabi) to moderate the image of a virulently anti Western Islamist and to white wash his intellectual progeny and followers, the Muslim Brotherhood. To understand Qutb, one must first understand his origins. Sayyid Qutb grew up in a backwater village in southern Egypt the son of an "effendi" (educated man) who was manager of an estate of a wealthy family. His community was steeped in the conservative Shafi'i rite of Islamic religion and the mythology of the "fellahins" (peasant laborers). Sayyid's education was focused on and limited to religious studies at the local school. During his formative years his social interactions were governed by restrictedly conservative customs. When he arrived in Cairo, a 23 years old man, he experienced culture shock. As a shy, introverted and socially awkward individual, he found that he could not easily fit into the modern liberal society of Cairo, where men and women intermingled at University and at work. Sayyid was uncomfortable around women, especially educated ones, and had great difficulty relating to them. He remained a bachelor his entire life. The freedom of Western women offended him, solidifying his opinion of the West as a cesspool of decadence that should not be emulated but must be eradicated. Consequently, he retreated to his comfort zone of religion. Qutb never totally embraced secularism but, under the influence of Hassan al Banna, he dabbled in communist ideology that he eventually tried to incorporate within his writings on Islam. Many prominent "Ulamas" consider Qutb, al Banna, Abu Ala'a Mawdudi and al-Nabahani as misguided Islamist intellectuals of the 20th century who offered a brand of Islam blended with elements of Socialism, Communism, Ba'athism, presenting them as reform, and all of which required violent revolutions to topple the tyrants and replace them with Islam rule. Qutb took the Leninist approach of a small band of elitist vanguards who engineer a coup or revolution (and everyone else were apostates). When his friend and mentor Hassan al Banna was hanged in 1949, for his assassination of Nokrashi Pasha, Qutb was in America but that unalterably radicalized him against the government. Upon his return he began to agitate against the government, espousing violence. In 1953 he assumed a leadership position in the Muslim Brotherhood and became its guiding ideologue, railing against the exploitation, apostasy, and immorality of the government and the decadence of fellow Muslims aping Western behavior. The foundation of Qutb's ideology was the concept of "Jahilyyah" (ignorance..of Islam), a barbaric way of life contrary to the teaching of the Prophet and Allah. Anyone or government living in Jahilyya should be eliminated to allow the Islamic resurrection to flourish. As one of the instigators of the failed assassination attempt of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the very popular Egyptian President, Qutb and thousands of "Brothers" were arrested and imprisoned (1954). During his confinement, Qutb wrote his political manifesto "Signposts" (Ma'alem fi al tareeq) and the 30 volume opus "In the shadow of the Qura'an" (Fi zil al qura'an) "tafsir", an exegesis that he liberally plagiarized from the work of Amin al-Kholi. Sayyid was freed, along with all the jailed "Brothers", by Nasser, in 1964, but was rearrested again for plotting once more to overthrow the government. Sayyid Qutb was tried and hanged on August 29, 1966. His venomous ideology is the guiding light of the Muslim Brotherhood, as shown in 1981 by the assassination of President Anwar al Sadat by a militant offshoot "Jama'at al Jihad" (Society of struggle) led by Muhamed Adb al-Salam Farag. The latter penned a pamphlet, "The Neglected Obligation" (Al Farida al-Gha-i-bah) mirroring Qutb's ideas "that acceptance of a government was only possible when that government fully implemented Shari'a and that Jihad is not only "the neglected obligation" but it is the most important obligation of true Muslims". Inspired by Qutb, today, the majority of Muslim populations in the Arab and Islamic states favor Shariah law, including death for apostasy, veiling and restrictive subordination of females (a tribal, but not Islamic, custom), amputations for thievery and stoning as retribution for adultery - a retrogression to brutal, savage and barbaric early-medieval Arabian tribal culture. Sayyid Qutb was a misogynist who advocated subordination of women, in spite of the assertion of Toth "that he read to the women of the village". He was a virulent anti-Semite and considered all non-believers dhimmis who should be subjugated and pay the Jiziah tax. Labeling Qutb a "moderate Islamist" in his early years is an oxymoron and non sequitur, similar to saying "moderately pregnant" (you are either pregnant or not!). The majority of true Muslims in the world are benign peaceful people, but there are no "moderate Islamists"; Islamists are fascist radicals who advocate violence and terror. The many examples of the author's overreach to make his subject less repulsive and more sympathetic, did not work on me; I read Qutb's writings in their original Arabic and no amount of subtle burnishing can make me change my opinion. The three stars are not because of the unsympathetic subject of the book but for its inconsistencies.

Sayyid Qutb is widely considered the guiding intellectual of radical Islam, with a direct line connecting him to Osama bin Laden. But Qutb has too often been treated maliciously or reductively-"the Philosopher of Islamic Terror," as Paul

Berman famously put it in the New York Times Magazine. James Toth offers an even-handed account of Sayyid Qutb and shows him to be a much more complex figure than the many one-dimensional portraits would have us believe. Qutb first gained notice as a novelist, literary critic, and poet but then turned to religious and political criticism aimed at the Egyptian government and Muslims he deemed insufficiently pious. After a two-year sojourn in the U.S., he returned to Egypt even more radicalized and joined the Muslim Brotherhood, eventually taking charge of its propaganda operation. When Brotherhood members were accused of assassinating Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the group was outlawed and Qutb imprisoned. He was executed in 1966, becoming the first martyr to the Islamist cause. Using an analytical approach that investigates without passing judgment, Toth traces the life and thought of Qutb, giving attention not only to his well-known *Signposts on the Road*, but also to his less-studied works like *Social Justice in Islam* and his 30-volume Qur'anic commentary, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*. Toth's aim is to give Qutb's ideas a fair hearing, to measure their impact, and to treat him like other intellectuals who inspire revolutions, however unpopular they may be. In offering a more nuanced account of Qutb, one that moves beyond the cartoonish depictions of him as the evil genius lurking behind today's terrorists, Sayyid Qutb deepens our understanding of a central figure of radical Islam and, indeed, our understanding of radical Islam itself.

"Toth provides an important analysis of one of the most influential Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century. He presents a portrait that includes Qutb's activities as a young Egyptian intellectual as well as his later works as an articulator of militant Islamic ideologies. A special strength of this study is that Toth provides a much-needed contextualization of Qutb within Egyptian intellectual life during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century." --John Voll, Professor of History, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

"Toth avoids the trap of automatic, simplistic condemnation and instead unveils the vexing, evolutionary and ultimately fascinating mind of Qutb. The book is a surprising and rounded read." --Publishers Weekly

"Toth provides an important analysis of one of the most influential Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century. He presents a portrait that includes Qutb's activities as a young Egyptian intellectual as well as his later works as an articulator of militant Islamic ideologies. A special strength of this study is that Toth provides a much-needed contextualization of Qutb within Egyptian intellectual life during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century." -- John Voll, Professor of History, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

"An evenhanded analysis of Qutb's philosophies in light of his experiences." --Library Journal

"Excellent . . . hefty and impressively researched . . . [Toth's] book provides a useful prcis of the main themes that Qutb explored and the terms he introduced. This is no small feat, considering that the Muslim Brotherhood's preeminent thinker penned countless articles and more than twenty books, one of them a six-volume commentary on the Koran." --New York of Books

"In providing a balanced account of Qutb's ideas, [Toth] measures their impact, and approaches him like other intellectuals who inspire revolutions, however unpopular they may be to some. While Qutb is reviled by propagandists of a certain bend, Toth's work deepens the understanding of a central figure of a movement." --Islamic Horizons

"Toth presents a balanced, nuanced picture of the often-misunderstood Qutb..." --Journal of Church and State

About the Author James Toth is an anthropologist who studies Egypt, the Arab world, and the wider Islamic community. He has taught at the American University of Cairo and at Northeastern University, and since 2011, has worked at New York University in Abu Dhabi. He is the author of *Rural Labor Movements in Egypt and Their Impact in the State, 1961-1992*.