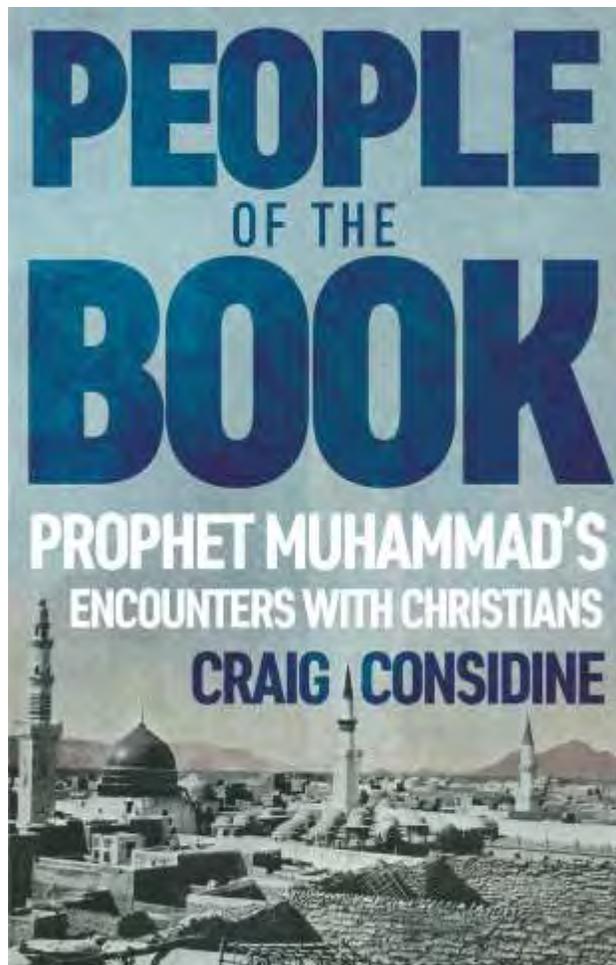


PWPA USA Professors Interview Series: Dr. Craig Considine

Frank Kaufmann
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Dr. Craig Considine speaks on his new publication, *People of the Book: Prophet Muhammad's Encounters*

Dr. Craig Considine is an Irish-Italian American award winning scholar of Islam, author, and professor at the prestigious Rice University. In this interview we talk about his new publication, *People of the Book: Prophet Muhammad's Encounters*

Please read more on Dr. Craig Considine here:

About Craig Considine

Dr. Considine is an award winning professor and the best-selling author of *The Humanity of Muhammad – A Christian View*. Dr. Considine is recognized as an authority in interfaith dialogue. He has written seven books and multiple articles for the field of Christian-Muslim relations and Islamic studies. Dr. Considine's opinions appear regularly in leading news and media outlets around the world. Considine also has experience in film-making, having directed the critically acclaimed documentary film *Journey into America*. He is a practicing Roman Catholic of Irish, Italian, Scottish, and English descent and a native of Needham, Massachusetts. Dr. Considine holds a PhD in sociology from Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, an MSc Lond. in international relations from Royal Holloway, the University of London, and BA in international relations from American University in Washington, DC.

Please listen to this important conversation here:

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Transcript

Dr. Frank Kaufmann: Dr. Considine, great to see you. Thanks very much for making time to be with us today.

Prof. Craig Considine: Thank you.

Dr. Kaufmann: We're really grateful.

Prof. Considine: Thank you, sir.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah, so you've produced yet another book, do you have any idea how it's doing? Is it kind of hitting the charts?

Prof. Considine: It's not as high as *The Humanity of Mohammed*, the previous book. Some of that has to do with the publisher. But it also has to do with just lack of in-person events, because those are big. They're book signings, so people will buy big bulk, and then have an in-person book signing. But we can't really do that. I've done a couple, but not as many as I would have hoped.

Dr. Kaufmann: Okay. Hopefully, that horizon will open up not just for your book, but for the rest of us to go out and...

Prof. Considine: Yes.

Dr. Kaufmann: spend a day out with the family. So, you changed publishers? Because we did a conversation on humanity and it was really informative. And so this one, this was hard work. It was serious to get it out on a schedule the way you have.

Prof. Considine: Yeah. It was more heavy into the academic side of things. *The Humanity of Mohammed* was kind of a more popular book with a publisher that isn't simply academic. It can be academic, but this one was new territory for me as well, diving into really Christian history as...

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: much as Islamic history. So, it was a completely different both project. You know, everyone has its own unique flair.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. And so, you went with a slightly more academic publisher.

Prof. Considine: Yes, sir. Hearst.

Dr. Kaufmann: Interesting.

Prof. Considine: And it's...

Dr. Kaufmann: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Prof. Considine: Yeah. It has a deal with Oxford University Press. So Oxford sells, they have distribution rights here in North America.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: And elsewhere around the world. It goes under Hearst. I don't necessarily understand that dynamic. But I'm thankful for excellent publisher, obviously, like Oxford to...

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: at least have some interest in the book. That's always good.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah, that's a great accomplishment. So...

Prof. Considine: Yes, sir.

Dr. Kaufmann: different things have different pluses. Maybe the popular book makes a couple of bucks more but to have Oxford as a notch on your belt will open up a bigger universe for sure. Oxford is great on inter religious affairs, they have a lot of the huge departments dedicated purely to various inter religious, bilateral inter religious communities that I've worked with. I can't remember names right now. But they're the Oxford group on Hinduism. It's...

Prof. Considine: Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: I mean, it's mighty in the world...

Prof. Considine: Yeah, it is.

Dr. Kaufmann: of scholarship in that arena. And so yeah, wishing you a lot of success on...

Prof. Considine: Thank you.

Dr. Kaufmann: sales and stuff. And it's interesting, we haven't had a chance to speak yet, you and I, but I prepared questions. And even just in this little short chat, before I get to my questions, already, some of the things have come up. Because the book is kind of a hybrid, I feel. There is an enormously popular feel to it. Correct? I mean, were... Y eah. trying to have a readership beyond just that kind of narrow academic, kind of jousting match? I've been in the academy myself, and it gets very narrow and very intense in there.

Prof. Considine: It does.

Dr. Kaufmann: When I read this one, people of the book, it reads, you know, everybody can read it. A guy in the church can read it, the guy who has a new Muslim worker in the office, it reads well enough. And a lot of that academic work doesn't.

Prof. Considine: Yeah. And this is something that I consciously and deliberately do. I want to tell a really good story. It's a book and a book needs to be interesting. It needs to be engaging, it needs to flow, it needs to leave readers kind of a little on edge, like where's this going? Whereas like an academic article or book, it's like, you know, it's like overly structured. And yes, it is more intense. There's no doubt, right? Because it's more academic in nature. But I think academics can do a little bit more, and I'm speaking broadly, to make their work more easily digestible in the public realm.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: And I think this is really important because it ultimately gets back on what the academics aim and goal is, you know, who is the audience?

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: I often ask my students about the question of like, you know, who are you writing for, who's your audience or who are you speaking to?

Dr. Kaufmann: Correct.

Prof. Considine: And I'm inspired by other let's say, more unconventional academics like Karen Armstrong. You know her?

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: The reason why I loved her books was because they were so well written. It was such a good story. But it was also very well sourced and well cited. So people of the book, like if you go into the notes section, and I'm sure you saw that thing, it's huge, probably too big. Because I'm like, well, this is really technical. I don't want to shove it in the text, because readers are gonna be like, 'What is this'?

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: What are we getting into? So I just put it in the back, you know?

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. And you mentioned structure. And that was not in my prepared question, but it is in me that you're blending two things. It's both thematic and chronological. The both.

Prof. Considine: Yes.

Dr. Kaufmann: Because yes, you start with the Prophet, peace be upon him. You start with the Prophet as a little baby, kind of meeting a Christian, what is a little baby who's a Christian, who is anything, right?

Prof. Considine: Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: It's just whether it's a nice guy or not, or lady or not. And then it goes all the way to his Farewell Sermon. So, it's chronological. But then you have these fantastic thematic breakdowns through six or seven chapters, angels and souls. And so, I was curious about was that hard or was it fun? And can you speak to that for a second about this blending chronology and blending thematic, which are often your options, never rarely both?

Prof. Considine: Well, you brought up the term fun. Writing the book was fun, but it was also difficult, but researching the book was really fun, different, you know, that's when you're reading, you're like, wow, look at all these stories. And, you know, I started obviously, documenting the timeline of his life, but I think it was maybe a year into the start of the book, where I really had to make a decision, you know, there's a deadline. So I'm thinking in my head, alright, I need to make sure I'm delivering this manuscript

when I said I would. So I looked at my text, and I had 18 chapters, very short chapters. And I would focus on pretty much either the names of individuals or groups. So the story that you mentioned, Frank, is Mohammed's Encounter with The Hero of The Monk. So like, Chapter One was The Hero of The Monk. And then it went to like War in the Fall, and then it went all the way down. And I thought that could have worked. But then I started thinking, well, like, what is the bigger picture here, and what are the different phases of his life? So like the six or seven chapters, I can't remember now how many chapters there are, but it's really parts of his life that I was like, you know, at this point in his life, it's the mystic that comes out. You know, prior to Mohammed receiving his revelations in the year 610, he was in many ways a mystic. And he was meeting mystics, and I think he liked spending time with mystics. And some of these mystics happened to be Christians, I think. So, there was a significant rewrite to blend that chronology and that thematic analysis.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. It's quite a challenge and I thought you managed it very well. It's bad enough to try to walk in the middle of a big argument. And somehow you managed to walk into like, five big arguments or something like that. The Christian theological argument, the Muslim historical argument, the textual argument, I thought it's kind of like a testament to courage in a way, the book itself in a way.

Prof. Considine: Well, I think, you know, that's the power of stories. Like, a really good story is not complicated. And it's like, in many ways, it's not that I dumb things down, but I really try to make things as simple as possible. And I think that maybe when you make things simple, it challenges people to think whether it is that simple. Could it be that simple? So yeah, it's a mystery. I don't have the answers as to why I'm potentially able to get a reader thinking about five different things at one time. I don't know. I don't deliberately do that, I'll tell you that, I'm not that skillful. But yeah, it goes back to my audience. Like when you just tell simple stories, it gets a wider group of people thinking about something. Maybe that's what it is.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. Well, what I meant by stepping in a big melee is that the Muslims alone by themselves will be arguing about their own history, not with knives. You know, like, there's schools of thought that are just wildly intense. I don't want to give it a bad look, but you know, at odds and they're intensely on opposite sides of a lot of issues, just in a single. Then you go to the Christian theological history or history of Christianity, which you cover. And the only reason why you're covering it is to show how it juxtaposes to the Prophet's life.

Prof. Considine: Precisely.

Dr. Kaufmann: But the thing is that, while you're on your way to kind of say, getting the Christian story there, it's not your point. It's just wanting to show who the Prophet is. Meaning, you're going to have a bunch of Christians yelling and screaming arguments theological, we'll see.

Prof. Considine: Yep. And this is one of the ramifications and consequences of writing about these things. You know, you're going to ruffle feathers, you know, you can't please everyone, as my mom taught me. So, this issue of different groups of Christians looking at the text, the book that I wrote, and how I describe some of the Christians that Mohammed interacted with. You know, I really tell the history of Christianity in this book as well.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yes.

Prof. Considine: And essentially, what I'm arguing is that the groups of Christians and many of the individuals that Mohammed had interacted with, were basically considered by the overwhelming Christian authorities in the world as potential outsiders or to put it in starker terms, heretics. So, there are Christian leaders who are friends of mine, who are critical of my work, and that's fine, who basically say, like, I've got the Christianity wrong, that I've told the wrong version of Christianity. And you know, these Christian leaders are those who are increasingly hesitant to see like a blending of Christianity and Islam. Because, that's kind of what I'm saying in this book is that like, you know, some of these Christians and Mohammed basically had the same ideas about the Almighty, about creation, and the creator. And when you put it that way, it's like, hey, these were you know brothers in spirit, and perhaps even in faith, but they identify themselves as different, perhaps, with different categories and identities. You know, that challenges people's fundamental core beliefs. To put this precisely in context, it was how this criticism that I received from another Christian leader, which was done in private, which I really appreciate and respect rather than doing it publicly.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: And the criticism of my work was that I had mis-described the relationship between Peter and Paul. And my understanding is that Peter and Paul were cordial. But they had significantly different approaches and beliefs.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: And then, this ultimately developed over the course of three centuries, and then when we get to 325, with the Council of Nicea, a lot of stuff happens there. And I talk about this in the book, you know. And so yeah, you know, you're going to get criticism from Christians, you're going to get criticism from Muslims from all different walks of life. And that's just what it is. I respect that. If people have criticism of my work great, but please do it in private. That's the kind you know, it's very kind.

Dr. Kaufmann: Like the Yelp Scholars life. The poor restaurant is trying to survive and one guy gets a pickle in the wrong part of his hamburger and destroys the rest so.

Prof. Considine: Pretty much.

Dr. Kaufmann: You know, I'll try to improve and get it right.

Prof. Considine: Especially for our friends, you know. Especially you know, people criticize my work who have never met me in their life and they create you know, YouTube videos about how terrible of a scholar in a person I am. I mean, they haven't even met me. But if you're my friend, A, like be a good friend. If you want to inform me and criticize me, I'm all for it, good friends do that. But please do it respectfully, you know?

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. It's part of the disease of the time.

Prof. Considine: Yes, sir.

Dr. Kaufmann: The keyboard is so close and our own little 15 minutes of fame and that's so often riding on the labors of others. It's kind of like suddenly everybody has something to say to Joe Rogan. What do I have to say to Joe Rogan? But that's the big light. So my little voice want. And so there, you've like killed yourself, put a book out, you've done a lot of scholarship, a lot of reading, and here's a chance to kind of ride on somebody else's.

Prof. Considine: Yeah, I don't know. I think there's like an ego element to it. There's envy, and I think jealousy, unfortunately. You know, where I'm doing something that other people wish they were doing more of. And that is sad. And that's upsetting. You know, I don't want to see that energy anywhere.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: But it is what it is.

Dr. Kaufmann: It is. And also the Academy has always been the place where there's a bit of exhibitionism with one's intellect, one wants to be heard wider. So a mature friend will come and get into it over an evening with you on the Christian theology. And those are sweet nights.

Prof. Considine: Yes. With food and hospitality, yes.

Dr. Kaufmann: Absolutely. I mean, if that's what you got, if you got a fat wallet, you pick up the check for 20 people, and you're looking good. But if you're in the world of the mind, people want to be seen with their ideas. And that's why they might criticize publicly, because that's what the Academy is, in a way. It's kind of an exhibition of how smart we are. That's the challenge of the discipline in the art. Let me look at a couple of my own questions. If one goes to your site, which we'll have linked in the notes, Craigconsidine.com. No, what is it?

Prof. Considine: I think it's Doc, I think it's Dr. Craig, last name.

Dr. Kaufmann: Dr.CraigConsidine.com. It'll be in the notes. One sees that your PhD is in sociology.

Prof. Considine: Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: Some of your work is in International Relations and the like. And yet, you've produced a work that's highly theological and religious history of Christian thought, history of Muslim theological, scriptural development. When did the Christian- Muslim conversation become a thing in your life?

Prof. Considine: That is a great question. Yeah, cuz my journey, you know, my academic journey. If I can bring you back, I think I have to go back to answer that question.

Dr. Kaufmann: Please do.

Prof. Considine: It starts in 2004. I'm an undergraduate at American University, I transferred to American in Washington, DC, with the hope of really trying to like understand what happened on 9/11. And I had really no literacy or experience related to Islam, and never met a Muslim. I grew up in Needham, Massachusetts, primarily Christian, and a small Jewish population. So, I go to DC and I was

interested in like, international affairs, politics. And when I get there, I'm interested in learning Arabic, which I did, and looking more at the International angles, you know, because there was this huge discussion of like, you know, Islam being like this completely other civilization, just like completely different way of life. So I was like, alright, well, who are they and why do they do this on? So I get into another class, which was called the World of Islam, with Professor Akbar Ahmed, and on the first day of class, he had shared with me a hadith or a saying of Prophet Mohammed, which is, 'The ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr'. And for whatever reason, those words coming from him too like really shook me to my core because it challenged really the fundamental beliefs of what I thought I was studying. I thought I was studying like religion and like, politics and civilization, but Dr. Ahmed put it in terms of like, well, there's something sacred going on with knowledge and learning and dialogue and meeting people. So, it's not just the knowledge that comes from peer reviewed journal articles and books. It's the knowledge that also comes through human experience. So, that fascinated me. And I get into Islamic studies through the interfaith dialogue prism because I saw interfaith dialogue and all the things that come with it as the antidote to the clash of civilizations. So, I went under Dr. Ahmed's wing. When I graduated and moved on, I went to London. I came back, my master's thesis was looking at the lived experiences of Mexican Americans in the American Southwest. It actually had nothing to do with Islam. I come back to the United States and I joined Professor Akbar Ahmed, on his two-year ethnographic study called Journey into America, the Challenge of Islam, and I was his film director, and we wrote a book. So this was exploring the question of what it meant to be an American through the lens of Muslims. So I did that, you know, still not in...

Dr. Kaufmann: Did you say you were his film director?

Prof. Considine: I was his film director. So, there's a YouTube documentary directed by myself, produced by Dr. Ahmed. It's a full-length feature film, it's about an hour and 40 minutes. We interviewed Noam Chomsky, Jesse Jackson, Hamza Yusuf. It was actually widely praised as a low budget film, but we did it. So then, I moved to Dublin. And I basically wanted to do something like Dr. Ahmed had done; an ethnographic study, but more specific because it's a PhD. And I focused on a specific group, Pakistanis that you know, overwhelmingly kind of Muslim when you think of the overall Pakistani population. So when I was in Dublin, this is where the Christian Muslim thing comes in. It was while I was in Dublin that I got a hold of John Andrew Moro's book, *The Covenants of the Prophet Mohammed*. And for me, this book, and the content of it was, again, the antidote to the clash of civilizations. Because when this book came out, ISIS was doing its thing and there was a lot of stuff happening in the world, which was not good. So then I just became really interested in the life of Prophet Mohammed. So this was like 2014. I really didn't study Prophet Mohammed's life up until then. And then I just kind of really, the further I got into it, the more I saw value in it. Not only you know, personally, and spiritually, but also more of like the academic, like public need, like this is a service that these covenants and these books that I'm reading need to be shared out into the public. And that's basically what I've been trying to do. Just bringing more knowledge into the public sphere. And to shed light on these wonderful stories that have been documented of Mohammed's encounters with Christians as an antidote, you know, to the clash. So, it's been quite a journey.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. It's incredible story. Your encounter with...

Prof. Considine: Yes, Akbar Ahmed.

Dr. Kaufmann: You said he's at what university?

Prof. Considine: American, in DC.

Dr. Kaufmann: Okay.

Prof. Considine: American University.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. And you were doing a master's degree there?

Prof. Considine: I did my undergraduate there.

Dr. Kaufmann: Undergraduate.

Prof. Considine: And then I went to University of London to study International Relations. And I actually focused on more sociological issues, integration with Mexican American identity. And miraculously, my wife ends up somehow being mixed up in that subject. Which is interesting.

Dr. Kaufmann: And so do you remain in contact with Professor Akbar? Yes, we do. The last time I spoke with Dr. Ahmed was after my Newsweek article that came out. So, this is about a year and a half ago. And he had messaged me just saying that he was proud of what I was able to succinctly write about in that Newsweek article. Because, this Newsweek article went kind of viral, you know? It's Newsweek

so the world knows about Newsweek, and people were just shocked to see an article from someone like me talking about COVID and Prophet Mohammed recommendations on tackling it. So he reached out to me and just said he was proud of me. And I wrote him back and just said, you know, he is like it's like a Divine Presence for me. It was like an angel that came and guided me. And it was meant to be. Like God linked me with Dr. Ahmed, which was like this is believe this teacher believe in this person. And that's what I did. You know, I put my faith and my trust in Dr. Ahmed, and it did some amazing things, I think, you know?

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. He is a very important person in American culture especially after 911. He's highly influential, and has a very big footprint in Washington, DC.

Prof. Considine: Especially interfaith, you know?

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. **Prof. Considine:** The interfaith realm. I mean, he's an award winning Professor. After 911, he had just got there and then 911 happened.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: You know for him, that was his mission that the Creator put him there to ease the pain that the country experienced.

Dr. Kaufmann: It's really true. As I'm listening to you, I'm going to have to collect all the links to all the things you reference, the video, the Newsweek article.

Prof. Considine: Sure.

Dr. Kaufmann: So, we will have everything there for our hearers to go listen and watch. Why were you so capable at filmmaking? Was this a lifelong hobby? How did that?

Prof. Considine: I was capable because of my enthusiasm. And my ability to work hard, because it was very hard, but I had faith in what it could be. I had absolutely no experience ever at filmmaking. I was 22, and we had a small research team of four other assistants that traveled around the country with Dr. Ahmed. And basically, he's like, I want to make a documentary. I don't want Al Jazeera or BBC following us with a huge crew, because it'll be overwhelming. And he really wanted it to be like ethnographic anthropological.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: So you know, he was like, 'Well, we're gonna do it'. And we just kind of looked around and everyone had their own task. And I was just like, the wild card. And he was just like, 'Do you want to do it'? I was like, 'Absolutely, I'll do anything. I'll do anything for this team. I believe in this team; I believe in this mission'. And that's what I did. And obviously, Frank, like, I messed up a bunch. And thankfully, Dr. Ahmed knew I was a complete amateur. You know, like I lost data, you know, like, we had so much footage, right. So I would film it, we would get home to the hotel, and I would have to clear the camera and the SIM card to make more space. And we had this big, clunky, hard drive backup. This is like 2008. And like, things just got lost, things were rewriting themselves. Like I had no idea what I was doing. And thankfully, we had enough to make this documentary. There's also a YouTube channel that has, I think there are like 58 videos on there. So, I would make the short documentaries. So as we were in the field, you know, I would go home to my hotel room, we had all this footage, and I would put together you know, 5, 10-minute short documentaries on the people we met. And then at the end, we made it a documentary. You know where I edited it actually? I edited it at Roosevelt Island in New York City. Yeah. So yeah, that's the last month of this book project. I was sitting with Robert Krupp who's a film editor, and we would meet in his office every day, you know, and I was just living on someone's couch. My best buddy Mark, I was living on his couch for like two weeks in Manhattan. So every morning I would get up, I will take that big trolley thing over Roosevelt...

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: Island to make my big super budget documentary.

Dr. Kaufmann: It's just fantastic. It's a small world indeed. I always cycled over the 59th Street Bridge. So if I had a flat tire, I might have ended up in the middle of your editing.

Prof. Considine: It could have happened you know; we don't even have the memory for it. It could have happened, who knows?

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. Isn't that fantastic? I think my next question, I just want to take a look, I was gonna ask why you wrote this particular book, but I think we heard that in a way.

Prof. Considine: Yeah. I can add one thing.

Dr. Kaufmann: I think there must be more. But somehow the 911 hit you very hard and then you come under the light of this erratic visionary Professor Akbar Ahmed. And that blended into somehow an extension of a persistent work in your life, for bringing greater harmony among these two massive cultural spheres, the biggest asset that's ever existed in history. I think that...

Prof. Considine: Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: maybe Alexandria time, I don't know, but never two side by side like that. But anyway, this particular book, does it have a special strategic or tactical part of the flow or?

Prof. Considine: Yeah, it does. So, as you mentioned Frank, the book is really a biography of Mohammed's life, and subsequently, it's a history book on Islam and Christianity. But of all the biographies of Prophet Mohammed and there are countless...

Dr. Kaufmann: Yes.

Prof. Considine: there haven't been really many at all, if any, that has told his life story through the prism of a specific group of Christians, right? So, John Andrew Moro's book, *The Covenants of the Prophet Mohammed*, it's not more like a textbook, but it's more like academic where mine is like it's a biography story. That's what it is.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: So, the book is unique in that way. You know, some of the biographies I love of Prophet Mohammed's life, you know, Karen Armstrong, Juan Cole, Martin Lings, and so on and so forth, they all have their own angles to it. You know, Juan Cole looked at it through the prism of civilizations, you know, so he looked at Mohammed's life story through the Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire. So my angle was just Christians specifically. And then the other angle is that I am, I guess, by profession, by title, a sociologist. And there haven't been many sociologists writing about Prophet Mohammed's life. Obviously, it's a relatively new discipline even though they trace it back to Ibn Hal Dun. But I look at it through the prism of these angles, you know, cross cultural navigation, racial equality, religious pluralism, civic nation building. Like those are all kind of like secular terms too. So, I kind of I take the religion not out of it. Obviously, if you read the book, it's heavy on theology and religion. But yeah, in some instances, it centers kind of sociological theory. And I think that's a contribution to the body of literature on Mohammed's life.

Dr. Kaufmann: Excellent. That's very, very illuminating. As I've already read it, it helps me think back on what I've read with more light. You mentioned a number of important Western scholars who've written biographies of Mohammed. You mentioned, Karen Armstrong, Professor Ling, etc. And here for you too, now you've introduced yet another prism as you just said, a prism through which to look at the life of the Prophet? Do you know of these people you mentioned, and now you're in the bowl as well, do believing Muslims, and especially those that have some responsibility for kind of orthodoxy of some sort, either out of Al Azhar or, you know, are any of the Western biographies very well received or regarded as like, for example, Karen Armstrong's biography, is that understood to be while you've got us? You got it doing well.

Prof. Considine: Good. That's a really good question. And it reminds me of an article that has yet to be published that I read on a recent flight to where was I, California, I think. This peer reviewed journal article was a history of the biographies of Mohammed. So it goes all the way back and then it brings us up to, yeah, it brings us up to the current. And then, it had a component to it, this article of like, the Western body of knowledge, the Western literature. So here's what I think. Yes, to answer your question succinctly, there are like Western articles or Western writers that are well received. Now going as high up as Al Azhar. You know, that's getting into stuffy territory. So, I had just read an article that is yet to be published. But it's a peer reviewed journal article which is focusing on the history of Prophet Mohammed's biographies, and it has a component to it that looks at the kind of Western contribution to the body of knowledge. And this article, actually brought up the same people that I had just brought up; Karen Armstrong, Juan Cole, Martin Lings, William Montgomery Watt of the University of Edinburgh. So, there are certainly Western perspectives coming from Western scholars, if I could say that, that are highly regarded and reputable for sure. Now when we get to the elite, you know, Al Azhar I haven't done my research on that. If Al Azhar is giving the thumbs up to Karen Armstrong or some of these folks, but like, Martin Lings, William Montgomery Watt, Juan Cole, these are notable academics. And there are Muslim communities and Muslim scholars and leaders right here in the United States and in the so called Western world, who are also advocating for this kind of appreciation of the scholarly views coming from some of these folks. So I know Juan Cole has had several encounters with Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, of Zaytuna College out in California. And there's a great deal of academic respect between those two

leaders. So yes, thankfully, good scholarship can just be viewed as good scholarship, and it shouldn't matter really who is writing it. If it's academic, it's academic. That's the beauty of it.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yes. It's further down the line in my questions, but it comes all the way up to a form of encounter that many people may not be sensitive to. But the whole freedom of scholarly and critical inquiry into sacred space is a big element of what you're undertaking here. And I was going to ask about it later down the line, but you've touched upon it, when describing the relationship between like, Lings and Cole and...

Prof. Considine: Hamza Yusuf.

Dr. Kaufmann: Hamza Yusuf.

Prof. Considine: Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: Yeah. So, there are certainly people who, you know, scholars, leaders who feel like they're almost kind of like gatekeepers to this body of knowledge.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: You know, like they're at the door, and like, you have to knock to see if you can get permission to enter, which I think much of that has to do with identity. And that's where it becomes problematic. You know, a lot of people criticize me, I don't even think they read my work. But they're just like, well, he's Christian. So, I'm automatically written off.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: Automatically, by some people. And, you know, the fact that I don't have a theological degree, or a religious studies degree. I mean, this is another way of people kind of not allowing you into this space. And, you know, I don't understand that perspective. I think there's something else going on inside of people that, you know, they refuse to kind of let you in like that. But you know, it's a tough battle. And then sometimes it can get quite, I mean, it can get like hostile. So it's not only that they're not letting you in, like they're slamming the door on your face. And they're basically trying to intimidate you to not come back, like don't write about this thing. You know...

Dr. Kaufmann: Yes.

Prof. Considine: people are trying to silence me literally like, or to put it in kind of more modern terms, like, un-platform me. You know, so people are like, 'Don't retweet Craig, don't like him, don't promote his things, because he is who he is. And like, on the conspiratorial side, it's like he has an agenda'. You know, and so people really try to limit the reach that you could potentially have. And it's not just an academic thing. I mean, it comes from pseudo academics, it comes from religious leaders. It's really political, but it's also Frank, it goes back to identity. And identity is something that I've spent, you know, my last 15 years studying and thinking about and negotiating myself. And when we get to a point where we say that this person is this category, this category, this category, this category, and therefore cannot speak about this, that's a problem of not only freedom of speech, but like just thought and expression and possibility. So, it's a dangerous thing actually.

Dr. Kaufmann: It's a dangerous thing. We've somehow hit the stratosphere of that problem in every corner of life where whether you're allowed to even say this line is moving slowly. Do you know what I mean? It's like you're not from that shared experience or you've not been on the line long enough. You know what I mean? I made up a silly comparison but we're just in the [inaudible 39:25] of this issue of whether. And it's a massive loss. Of course perspective always helps us. I would love...

Prof. Considine: Of course.

Dr. Kaufmann: nothing more than to hear somebody that knows nothing about New York tell me the whole day, 'What do you know'.

Prof. Considine: What do you know? Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: Otherwise I'll never know...

Prof. Considine: You'll never know.

Dr. Kaufmann: this idea that I have the sole right. It's really hurt our family; our global family carry on.

Prof. Considine: Yeah, it hurts community. You know, it hurts community and community is multi layered. So, Frank you used the term 'shared experiences' and I think that's the critical thing. So going back to my point, if we look at you know, as someone with this identity, you know, racial, ethnic, religious, national, this is what it is. And therefore, because I am these things, I cannot relate to you that we have not had shared experiences. You know, we definitely have had different experiences, there's no question about that. But we've also had shared experience.

Dr. Kaufmann: Absolutely.

Prof. Considine: Where we can see eye to eye and we can become like, almost more brotherly or human, where I can understand you at a human level, in addition to all of these complications with your identity. But when people start saying these categories mean different experience, that is partially true, but the whole truth is that it's more nuanced, and that we are actually similar in many ways.

Dr. Kaufmann: Absolutely.

Prof. Considine: And we should talk about the similarities.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. We're moving evermore out to the surface characteristics and missing that. I mean, how could anyone say there's no shared experiences? Have you ever watched your one-year-old get too close to the edge of the bed? If you're Chinese, if you're Muslim, if you're Black, if you're White...

Prof. Considine: Exactly.

Dr. Kaufmann: did your heart do the exact same thing in that moment no matter who or what you are? And there are billions of shared human experience. It's kind of like, because I've been in a line of work similar to yours for the course of my life, I'm involved in inter religious relations. One thing we learned for sure is, the more we try to bring peace, the more all sides turn to get, you know, at least some part of all sides always.

Prof. Considine: Yeah, it's not easy. And you know who put it the best? Frank, you might know, Uncle Safi Kaskus, I call him Uncle Safi Kaskus.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yes, Safi.

Prof. Considine: You know Safi. Safi once just provided a very simple comment on one of my posts, and we talk kind of, you know, relatively, regularly. And he just said that, you know, I was getting a load of flak for a better I forget what it was. But he just said that, being a bridge builder, you know, like, you're literally like a bridge. And what do people do? Like they walk over bridges. So like, as a bridge builder, you're just trying to stand up and you're going to take a lot of pounding, a lot of beating, you remain, you know, you're strong. You have pillars, your mission is rooted in something that can withstand all of this stomping. So I think that's very, very true. And I try to remind myself of that. Like this is, you know, you're boxing like four different things rather than just one entity. Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. That's a great metaphor. I like that. I've never thought of it.

Prof. Considine: Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: And obviously, you're what people call a doormat, right? You're alone.

Prof. Considine: Yeah. They drag their feet on the...

Dr. Kaufmann: Tracks. Yes.

Prof. Considine: Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah. Let me see if I have one more question and then we'll continue on another session. And thanks for conversation. I asked if we could make it twice, because there's a tremendous amount.

Prof. Considine: 100%.

Dr. Kaufmann: This has been very rich. Let me just get to one other question. From afar, you've struck me as somehow managing well, writing and deadlines and it's hard for people. You're a family man, you have a new family and you're not a careless family man. The time with your wife and your daughters is important. You're not like the guy that comes home at 11 o'clock at night. And yet somehow you meet these deadlines. Another thing about the contemporary situation is there's an incessant flood of information and our mind leaps at it. And we want to write a short thing or we want to have a quick call. The flood of life against a sustained project, like writing a beautiful book like you've just created, do you have any secrets or things to help the young writer or the struggling or distracted folks? How does that

happen in your life that you consistently produce very impressive and very enjoyable and illuminating work?

Prof. Considine: Well first, thank you for those very kind words, Frank. I think there are a couple secret, you know, ingredients. The first is quite big picture. You know, growing up my dad, who really didn't come from much of anything, and had quite a difficult childhood, he told me as a young teenager, whatever you ultimately decide to do in your life, make sure you love to do it. And that always struck me. You know, he was not really able to do that. Well, he could have done it, but he opted for more financial things. And I was more about well you know, what do I love to do? And you know, it ultimately became this passion of learning, and knowledge and the possibilities that can come out of scholarship. So, I have deep passion for what I do, I have a lot of passion, and I love doing it. I find it challenging, it's enriching, and ultimately, I believe in it. I believe in the power of scholarship, of knowledge, and what comes out of it. So, that helps me to keep going, because I believe in it, you know, and I tell students this as well. You know, if they're like thinking about going to graduate school, a PhD, I said, 'Well, number one thing, you've got to want to do it, you've got to love doing it, you have to be involved'. And not like 90%, 95%, like in many ways, you got to be all in. Now, on the more kind of practical side, I'm good with my scheduling I guess. I'm able to figure out how to use my time, I also know when to drop things and have fun and relax and go do something different. You know, because when I was doing my PhD, I got completely burnt out at one point, I was doing way too much work, and it was way too difficult. And I just you know, literally burnt out, no gas in the tank, and couldn't do it. And you know, dealt with it for months on end. But now, I know like, 'Hey, just okay, you've done three hours, good stuff, go do something completely different. Go for a walk, go work out, go just hang out, go to a restaurant, go out'. So, it's a combination of like big picture, small picture. You know, you've got to be disciplined every day. But there has to be more vision to it for sure.

Dr. Kaufmann: Good. That's very helpful, grateful to hear it. As we come towards closing, I just want to tell the listeners and people who will be reading the transcript that we're discussing a piece of work that might very well be seminal. As I read it, I was quite surprised at where it took me. Because I consider myself knowledgeable about Islam, thanks to having intimate bonds of mentors and friendship similar to you all my life for decades. I have my doctoral degree in religious studies and religious thought. And yet I saw things in what you've written here that makes me think and makes me possibly think I have to add additional understanding that I had not anticipated. I was just waiting in an order to do a decent work in this interview. But I think I may have to add to my thought on it. So as the only reason why I mentioned that is because I want to get into a lot of really concrete stuff that you've covered, that I think might be seminal, and might be novel. And just as a little teaser, I think you've brought the theological and philosophical essence of what Islam is and the Christianity into which, but that surrounded it in its arising far closer than others may have noticed before.

Prof. Considine: Thank you.

Dr. Kaufmann: And that's what I want to look at when we come back. And so we've been a little kind of friendly in general, but I don't want the listeners to think that we're going to just come and talk more about general, take a break when you need to kind of...

Prof. Considine: Yeah.

Dr. Kaufmann: which was helpful. So, I really do want to get into very important elements and really deep research that you did. You could not have done this easily to try to take up theological roots of two systems that are complex.

Prof. Considine: Yes, sir. Let's dive into it. That sounds like a really interesting conversation for sure. So, let's dive into it.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah, we'll do that next time we're together. Dr. Considine or Craig, very happy for your time today.

Prof. Considine: Thank you, Dr. Kaufman. I didn't know who you are.

Dr. Kaufmann: Yeah.

Prof. Considine: Yes. It's a real pleasure, Frank. Thank you and I look forward to our next chat.

Dr. Kaufmann: Me too. Thank you so much.

Prof. Considine: Thank you.

Dr. Kaufmann: Bye, bye.

Craig Considine (academic)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Craig Considine (born 1985) is an Irish-Italian [American scholar of Islam](#), [author](#), and a [faculty member](#) of the Department of Sociology at [Rice University](#).^[1] He also has experience in [filmmaking](#), having directed the [documentary film](#) *Journey Into America*.^[2] Considine has written multiple works for the field of [Islamic studies](#), and is recognized as an authority in [interfaith dialogue](#) and [Christian-Muslim relations](#). He is a [Roman Catholic](#).^[3]

Craig Considine



Born	1985 Needham, Massachusetts, United States
Nationality	American
Alma mater	American University (BA) Royal Holloway, University of London (MSc) Trinity College Dublin (PhD)
Occupation	Christian commentator , scholar and author on Islam
Website	https://drcraigconsidine.com ^[?]

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-
- [Download as PDF](#)
 - [Printable version](#)
-
- [Languages](#)
 - [Add links](#)

Contents [hide]

- 1 [Life and career](#)
 - 1.1 [Birth and family](#)
 - 1.2 [Education and Professional Career](#)
 - 1.3 [Journey Into America \(documentary\)](#)
 - 1.4 [Islam, Race, and Pluralism in the Pakistani Diaspora](#)
 - 1.5 [Muslims in America: Examining the Facts](#)
 - 1.6 [The Humanity of Muhammad: A Christian View](#)
- 2 [Works](#)
 - 2.1 [Books](#)
 - 2.2 [Journal Articles](#)
 - 2.3 [Other Media](#)
- 3 [Other Engagements](#)
- 4 [See also](#)
- 5 [References](#)

Life and career [[edit](#)]

Birth and family [[edit](#)]

Craig Considine was born in 1985 and spent his childhood in [Needham, Massachusetts](#). He is of [Irish](#) and [Italian](#) descent.^[3] As a college student, he wanted to study [Arabic](#) and become an intelligence agent, so that he could spy on ‘bad’ Muslims. At the time, he had never even met a Muslim, and admitted to having fallen into the ‘[Islamophobia trap](#)’.^[4] In his youth, Considine attended the Catholic school Saint Bartholomew’s Church and the Needham Public Schools system. In 2001, Considine first experienced [discrimination](#) against the Muslim community. On the day the [World Trade Center](#) was hit, his class was told that it was a [terrorist attack](#). And on the days following this event, Considine overheard his schoolmates saying, ‘Down with Muslims.’ According to him, this was not something he could stand by.^[5]

Education and Professional Career [[edit](#)]

After graduating from [Needham High School](#) in 2003, Considine attended [American University](#), where he pursued a [bachelor of arts](#) in [International Relations](#). As an undergraduate student, he worked closely under Professor [Akbar Ahmed](#), the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies in the School of International Service. According to

Considine, his relationship with his professor helped him see the Muslim community through a different lens. It helped him shift his mindset. Ahmed also viewed Considine as one of his best students. Later, the two would collaborate on the *Journey Into America* documentary film.^[5]

Considine moved to [London](#) after finishing his undergraduate degree. There, he studied for a [master's in science](#) in International Relations at the [Royal Holloway, University of London](#). He graduated in 2008, then joined Ahmed to work on the documentary.^[5]

In 2011, Considine entered [Trinity College Dublin](#) to pursue a [Ph.D.](#) in the Department of Sociology.^[1] While undertaking his Ph.D. research, Considine also took on the role of Editor for the Trinity College Dublin Journal of Postgraduate Research. He oversaw the creation of Volume 11, entitled Ireland's Research On The World Stage.^[6] Along with this, he worked on his Ph.D. thesis, which focused on the experiences of young Pakistani men in Dublin and Boston. The manuscript was accepted and published in 2014.^[7] Considine graduated in 2015. After finishing his Ph.D., Considine moved to [Houston](#), where he took a job as a lecturer in Rice University's Department of Sociology and continues to teach.^[1] His classes focus on [self-directed learning](#) and [experiential learning](#). In previous years, Considine provided no assigned readings nor lectures during his class sessions. Instead, he invited guest speakers to share their expertise and encouraged students to ask their own questions.^[8] Later in 2020, he gained distinction as an educator when he received the Sarah A. Burnett Teaching Prize in the Social Sciences from Rice University.^[9]

***Journey Into America* (documentary)** [\[edit \]](#)

In 2008, after acquiring his master's degree, Considine partnered with his former professor, Akbar Ahmed to create *Journey Into America*. The documentary follows Akbar Ahmed and a group of young researchers as they document the Muslim experience in America. It also features notable figures, such as [Noam Chomsky](#), former Secretary of Homeland Security [Michael Chertoff](#), and [Reverend Jesse Jackson](#).^[10]

When Considine asked his professor about the project, Ahmed replied that it lacked a sufficient budget for him to come on. In order to join Ahmed in his [research project](#), Considine sent his resume to around 60 organizations. In the end, he received the funding he needed from [Dar Al Islam](#), an institution in [New Mexico](#) that seeks to promote the education of Islam in America.^[5]

With the grant, Considine was able to join Ahmed on his journey across the United States. He filmed Ahmed's group as they interviewed American citizens across 75 different cities and 100 [mosques](#).^[10] Considine also took charge of editing and processing the film. Later, his footage was used by popular news channels, such as [BBC World News America](#) and [CNN](#).^[5]

At one point, Considine and the rest of the team conducted a [social experiment](#) in [Arab, Alabama](#). They dressed one of their female team members in a full [abaya](#), and gauged onlookers' reactions. To their surprise, the people of Arab were kind and accommodating of their female teammate. Throughout their travels, they reported experiencing warmth and hospitality from locals of different cities.^{[10][11][12]}

Throughout the many interviews conducted by Ahmed and his team, they found that some people thought that Muslims could not be Americans. Conversely, they also interviewed American Muslims who were proud to be [citizens of the United States](#). Considine was very much involved in the entire process. He hoped that the film would help bridge the relationship between American Muslims and the rest of the country. According to Considine, people of varying faiths need to be understood.^[5]

Journey Into America premiered at the [Islamic Society of North America](#) conference in [Washington, D.C.](#) on July 4, 2009. The documentary was produced and narrated by Ahmed and directed by Considine.^[5] Ahmed also wrote a book on his experiences entitled *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam*.^[13] Both the documentary and the book are a follow-up to a different study conducted by Ahmed. It was entitled 'Journey Into Islam' and followed the same researchers as they traveled across Muslim countries. The research study also sprouted a documentary^[14] and a book.^[15] The documentary garnered praise for the team's dedication to their research. Ahmed's

work has cemented him as a contemporary [cultural anthropologist](#). With Considine's help, he was able to document the operation and distribute the finished material.^[16]

Islam, Race, and Pluralism in the Pakistani Diaspora [[edit](#)]

Considine's first book was published in 2017. It tackled what he referred to as 'Pakphobia' or the aversion to [Pakistan](#) in the Irish and American context. To gather information for the book, Considine met with over 40 people. He engaged them in [interviews](#) and held [focus groups](#) to build his book. Through his research, he found that Pakphobia in the Irish and American context stemmed from how the individuals viewed [Pakistanis](#) as Muslims. This then taps into a perceived threat of Muslims and [radical Islam](#).^[4] Considine garnered praise for the book's accessibility. Reviewers laud the text for being easy to understand for both academics and laypeople. Considine is also praised for putting together a vast selection of anecdotes from Pakistanis of varying ages and backgrounds.^{[17][18]}

Muslims in America: Examining the Facts [[edit](#)]

For his second book, Considine sought to document the real lives, actions, and beliefs of [American Muslims](#). According to him, he wanted to bring the community's voices and actions to light. The book answers 31 different questions relating to Muslims in American society. Throughout the text, Considine disproves widely believed myths. In one part of the book, he writes that Muslims condemn the violent actions of [extremists](#). He also delves into how the Muslim community contributes to interfaith dialogue.^[19]

The Humanity of Muhammad: A Christian View [[edit](#)]

Considine's latest book examines the life and influence of [Prophet Muhammad](#). Considine believes him to be misunderstood and writes about this with his Christian background in mind. The mix of a Christian perspective with Islamic beliefs draws out the possibility that [Islamic theology](#) can be appreciated by non-Muslim individuals.^[20] In the book, Considine delves into Muhammad's views on race, stating that he was not merely 'non-racist,' but [anti-racist](#). He also talks about [religious tolerance](#) and how it is not always enough in the context of [religious pluralism](#). Later, Considine introduces the concept of a 'civil nation state,' which is a community that transcends ethnic, tribal and religious boundaries. In such a community, people from diverse backgrounds can live under one government and one creator — [God](#).^{[3][21]}

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- [Family, Religion, and Identity in the Pakistani Diaspora: A Case Study of Young Pakistani Men in Dublin and Boston](#)^[28] (PhD Thesis). 2014. [Trinity College Dublin](#).
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Other Engagements [edit]

Throughout his professional career, Considine has spoken in multiple academic events. In 2012, he was a guest speaker for an event by [SOAS University London](#) that highlighted his work in *Journey Into America*. He was joined by his former professor, Ahmed. Also present were two other scholars in Muslim studies, Dr. Anshuman Mondal and Professor Peter Morey.^[38]

Considine was also invited to speak at [University of Arkansas](#), for an event entitled, 'Prophet Muhammad's Promises to Christians.' It was sponsored by notable organizations, namely the Al-Islam Students Association, the Humanities Program, the Department of Sociology, the [University of Arkansas Honors College](#), the Middle Eastern Center, and the Religious Studies Program.^[39]

Aside from speaking at academic events, Considine has also been a guest on podcasts. He's been invited to Podcast Noor, hosted by Noor Al-Huda, where he talked about the commonalities between Jesus and Muhammad. The episode highlights the interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Islam, saying that the two religious figures would have been friends if they'd met today.^[40] Another podcast Considine went on in This Being Human, which is supported by the [Aga Khan Museum](#). In that podcast, he also delves into his interest in interfaith dialogue. He highlights his belief that Christianity and Islam are not very different in essence, and pushes for the importance of interfaith cooperation, tolerance, understanding, and convergence.^[41] Considine has also made multiple appearances on [news outlets](#) to speak on current events regarding Islamophobia and other extremist acts related to religion. He's appeared on TRT World Now, an English-speaking Turkish public broadcaster news channel. There, he talked about the [Christchurch mosque shootings](#) and how this affected the public opinion on the Muslim community. In the interview, he highlighted how terrorism was an act not exclusive to a specific community, and spoke up against [politicians](#) who leveraged public ignorance to incite [religious-based discrimination](#).^[42] Considine has also been a guest in other international interviews, primarily in [Al Jazeera](#) features.^[43]^[44]

See also [edit]

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- [Dr. Craig Considine](#)^[46]. LinkedIn profile.
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