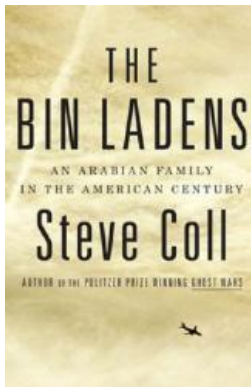


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The Family Bin Laden — Understanding the Times

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The name of the Bin Laden family is now known throughout the world – a name of infamy. But long before the events of September 11, 2001, the Bin Laden family was well established in Saudi Arabia and in much of the Arab world. Journalist Steve Coll, winner of the Pulitzer Prize while at *The Washington Post*, traces the development of the Bin Ladens in a narrative that is indispensable to understanding the events of 9/11 and the challenge Osama Bin Laden and radical Islamic groups now represent. The book, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*, is both important and timely.

On of the most important contributions of [this book](#) is its tracing of the history of the Bin Laden family against the backdrop of developments in the Middle East and around the world. Furthermore, he corrects many misunderstandings in the West. A common rationale offered for the source or motivation for terrorism is poverty — but the Bin Ladens are a family of extreme wealth, royal access, and privilege.

An excerpt:

The family generation to which Osama belonged — twenty-five brothers and twenty-nine sisters — inherited considerable wealth, but had to cope with intense social and cultural changes. Most of them were born into a poor society where there were no public schools or universities, where social roles were rigid and preordained, where religious texts and rituals dominated public and intellectual life, where slavery was not only legal but openly practiced by the king and his sons. Yet within two decades, by the time this generation of Bin Ladens became young adults, they found themselves bombarded by Western-influenced ideas about individual choice, by gleaming new shopping malls and international fashion brands, by Hollywood movies and alcohol and changing sexual mores — a dizzying world that was theirs for the taking, since they each received annual dividends that started in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. These Bin Ladens, like other privileged Saudis who came of age during the oil shock decade of the 1970s, became Arabian pioneers in the era of globalization. The Bin Ladens were the first private Saudis to own airplanes, and in business and family life alike, they devoured early on the technologies of global integration. It is hardly an accident that Osama's first major tactical innovation as a terrorist involved his creative use of a satellite telephone. It does not seem irrelevant, either, that shocking airplane crashes involving Americans were a recurrent motif of the family's experience long before September 11.

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