Ameen Rihani (1876-1940) was an influential Arab-Lebanese-American thinker, writer and political activist and was one of the most prominent humanist intellectuals of the 20th century. The career of this pioneering man during the late colonial era and early de-colonization was characterized by a progressive secular vision and an abiding interest in engaging both the Arab world and the West. In this lecture, Prof. Hajjar aims to demonstrate that while Rihani was the pioneer of Arab-American intellectual humanism—which reached its zenith with Edward Said—he remains an outstanding exemplar of what became the “Saidian theory” later in the century. She argues that in the light of today’s momentous world events and the search for global peace and cultural dialogue, Rihani’s secular vision of progress, liberal democracy and Arab-Western mutual respect is a balancing counterpoint to the obscurantism of both ideological fanaticism and the “clash of civilizations” paradigms.

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