

Anti-Muslim Rhetoric in the American Media: Sustaining a Culture of Fear

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Islamophobia¹ is a concept that has been instilled in society by means of historical reinforcement of stereotypes surrounding Islam and Muslims. This has consequently created a pervasive fear of “terrorism” that has consumed the United States prior to 9/11 and, especially, after the event. Coincidentally, this sensationalized hysteria exploded right after the perpetration of 9/11, evident in a poll conducted on the night of the 9/11 attacks which found that 58% of Americans were “somewhat” or “very” worried that a member of their family might become a terrorist attack victim². The British think tank, Runnymede Trust, lists eight characteristics of Islamophobia that identify the assumptions Westerners make about Islam:

1. Islam seen as a single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities.
2. Islam seen as separate and other- (a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures (b) not affected by them (c) not influencing them.
3. Islam seen as inferior to the West-barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist.
4. Islam seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in a ‘clash of civilizations.’
5. Islam seen as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage.
6. Criticisms made by Islam of ‘the West’ rejected out of hand.
7. Hostility towards Islam used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.

¹ “Unfounded hostility towards Islam, and therefore, fear or dislike of all or most Muslims.” Ali, Yaser. “Shariah and Citizenship: How Islamophobia is Creating a Second-Class Citizenry in America.” *California Law Review*.

² McQueeney, Krista. “Disrupting Islamophobia: Teaching the Social Construction of Terrorism in the Mass Media.” *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. 26.2, pg.2 (2014) Print.

8. Anti-Muslim hostility accepted as natural and 'normal.'

Islamophobia manifests itself explicitly, through the ongoing political campaigns that represent the religion as violent and an opposition force that requires elimination. Paradoxically, it manifests itself implicitly as well, through inaccurate media representations that exacerbated the fear people felt after the unpredictability of 9/11. Throughout this paper, I will assess the validity of these stereotypes and present an understanding of the motivations behind perpetuating a phenomenon such as this in the political sphere and media sphere.

An important part of this review is contained within the original research I conducted, which consisted of a survey experiment measuring the tolerance of Muslims among a liberal population at Hood College. My findings, which will be analyzed in a more in-depth manner later in this paper, suggest that information environment is significant in influencing tolerance of Muslims among students. Anti-Muslim rhetoric polarizes students to be even more tolerant, which may be a function of the Donald Trump quotes utilized in the stimulus prior to the tolerance questions. Also, pro-Muslim rhetoric was influential as well, demonstrating an increased tolerance for those who received positive rhetoric compared to that of the control. The pro-Muslim rhetoric and anti-Muslim rhetoric that respondents received will be detailed fully later in this paper.

In the first section of this review, I will outline the historical origin of Islamophobia and its increase in prominence through the uncertainty of the September 11, 2001 attacks, and post 9/11. In the next section, I will attempt to prove that the motivations behind perpetuating a phenomenon such as this are purely political and accomplish a certain agenda in the United States. Currently, national security interests

have been more important than preventing the further discrimination of Muslim-Americans. I will also present an accurate narrative concerning the history of discrimination that Muslim-Americans have faced through the accounts of those who have experienced it firsthand. In the third section, I will look at the effects of promoting a positive, pro-Muslim rhetoric on religious tolerance. I will propose ways in which anti-Muslim rhetoric can be combatted, and also indicate how to stay vigilant in a time where seemingly nothing is certain and Americans are being constantly inundated with a barrage of information that may or may not be true.

This study will demonstrate that the media controls much of how we view other cultures, particularly with the over-reporting of Middle Eastern conflict and the underreporting of how the United States also impacted and fostered much of this instability. Research like this is vital to providing an accurate narrative of cultural “others;” the significance of this label and its concurrence with stereotypical representations of Muslims will be demonstrated shortly. If Americans can see that their fear stems from an history of inaccurate portrayals of Muslims, Arabs, and Islam, the phenomenon of Islamophobia will begin to diminish in American society and the mindset that America is exceptional compared to other cultures will fade. Also, if Americans become aware of the information environment that they are being exposed to and the effect it is having on their perspective, this will contribute to a greater tolerance among the population.

Up until the 2016 election, Americans were beginning to see a decrease in the explosive fear and paranoia that persisted after 9/11. According to a poll in 2012, only 35% of Americans fear their loved ones will be a victim of a terrorist attack compared to

the 58% the night of the attacks³. I think this decrease has occurred only because the matter has become less close to home as time moves on, but with the onslaught of anti-Muslim rhetoric presented by Donald Trump, Americans are becoming more polarized towards allowing these stereotypical images to represent Muslim-Americans.

McQueeney characterizes this polarization as prevalent because students do not have a consistent, critical media literacy, and lack the tools to unpack claims makers' ideological and profit motives. The consequences and implications of their statements are not properly probed by the reader and are too readily accepted. Conversely, with respect to Islamophobia and terrorism, media literacy has been found to reduce students' anxiety about the portrayal of terrorism on television news.⁴

IRRATIONALITY OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

Islamophobia is a result of Americans' premature acceptance of media portrayals as valid and representative, with a noteworthy emphasis on the loss of control felt after the 9/11 attack. The above statistic represents this phenomenon, especially when in comparison with studies representing the actual likelihood of being affected by a terrorist attack. For example, it is more likely that an American will be crushed and killed by large furniture than killed in a terrorist attack⁵. Experts agree that the mass media has an overwhelming influence in representing these perceptions that maintain the perfect concoction for fear to persist throughout the United States. Fear concerns a sense of

³ Gallup, (2013). *Terrorism in the United States*. Retrieved from: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/4909/terrorism-united-states.aspx>

⁴ Comer, J., Furr, J., Biedas, R., Weiner, C., and Kendall, P. (2008). "Children and Terrorism-Related News: Training Parents in Coping and Media Literacy." *Journal of Clinical and Consulting Psychology*.

⁵ Shaver, Andrew. "You're more likely to be fatally crushed by furniture than killed by a terrorist." *The Washington Post*. 23 Nov. 2015. Web. 19 March 2017.

control, and terrorist attacks are uncontrollable, unpredictable, and often involve mass killing as a terror tactic⁶.

Daniel Kahneman identifies this influence as “extremely vivid image[s] of death and damage resulting from terrorist attacks are reinforced by media attention and frequent conversation, leaving us with highly accessible memories of such events. When people who have been exposed to such coverage later assess how likely more terrorism is, such events come readily to mind — and so they are likely to assign probabilities biased upward.”⁷ These isolated events of attacks are seemingly persistent, yet are they really as numerous as they seem? Or is the media focusing specifically on these events and overdramatizing the horror and atrocity when a threat is barely existent?

ISLAMOPHOBIA WITHIN THE MEDIA AND POLITICS

Sensationalizing terrorism certainly has caused Islamophobia to linger when a threat to national security is not necessarily imminent (or any more imminent than domestic threats for that matter). However, this fear is not unprecedented, considering many American families (and non-American families as well) were affected by the horrific tragedy of 9/11. However, the rhetoric that has arisen as a result has cultivated this fear by displaying images of terror and destruction, then associating them with the Muslim “Other”⁸. The recent persecution of anyone who does not represent the typical American demonstrates a prevailing culture of hatred that can be attributed to the constant inundation of unrepresentative stereotypes. Is this blame rightfully placed on the

⁶ Shaver, Andrew. Sense of control, and the tri-framework for psychological influence: “phenomenon can harm large numbers at once, attacks are unexpected, attacks are not controllable.”

⁷ Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. 2011. Print.

⁸ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books. (1978) Print.

media? Or should it go to politicians presented in the media sphere for perpetuating non-inclusive policies? Even if the latter is true, the media has control over which platforms they represent, therefore due to the “reality-TV show” style of American politics, Americans are absorbing information and forming perceptions of the world through the unique and biased media lens.

ANTI-MUSLIM RHETORIC AND DECREASED RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

The political sphere is often diffusing values that contradict the original founder’s intentions. Promoting a separatist culture and sole national identity defies the idea of an American “melting pot”⁹ of diversity. Categorizing people and determining their worth according to perceptions we have acquired through the media lens is the root of the issue, but also a difficult problem to address because the political system and campaign season in the United States is based on discrediting one another to accomplish policy goals. Thus, the media is to blame for continually focusing on anti-Muslim rhetoric, but it is even more haunting to realize that these reports often contain truths and falsehoods indistinguishable from one another in the full scope of American politics.

These truths represent the tolerance of America, as does the rhetoric within them, yet the twisted nature of America’s political system enables groups to portray a numerous amount of interests in a favorable or unfavorable light. Often, this phenomenon occurs with the motivation of capital and financial gain, which divides the public and further stratifies inequalities and attention to public problems. The concept of “fake news” is not

⁹ “America is God’s crucible, the great melting pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming!” Israel Zangwill. *The Melting Pot*. (1908)

unrealistic, but should be applied to media sources that have consistently presented themselves as unreliable, not the sources we have trusted for years and are repeatedly proven to be dedicated to journalistic accuracy and validity. Thus, the sense of fear Americans feel is amplified by the lens through which we view the Muslim “Other”: the mass media.

THE MEDIA PROMOTES FEAR OF MUSLIMS

Furthermore, this media’s focus on instilling fear has created a reluctance to allow Muslims who are suffering from oppression and persecution around the world into countries where they are attempting to seek asylum. This desensitization to suffering that does not occur on our own soil is a major effect of the constant bombings we view on the news. A typical sentiment is that it does not affect us, or that these countries such as Syria, are used to being decimated daily. Acceptance of death and tragedy is much easier to come by when the destruction is occurring thousands of miles across the planet, but the second it briefly touches the United States, a war on subjective concept such as “terrorism” must be instituted to combat its seemingly pervasive influence. The shock of 9/11 proves Americans act against terrorism and utilize the Muslim community as a scapegoat for a much more intricately woven attack that included the failure of many entities to prevent such a tragedy. The immediate response, instead of taking slow, cautious steps, created a frenzy.

Directly after 9/11, the attack was utilized as a political tool to garner support for the Iraq War, in which Iraq was wrongfully implicated.¹⁰ This created even more hatred

¹⁰ Schuster, Mike. "Going it Alone in Foreign Policy ." NPR. NPR, 9 Sept. 2002. Web. 19 Mar. 2017. <http://www.npr.org/news/specials/091102reflections/foreign_policy/index.html>.

for the Arab World, considering a Western view of the Eastern World was adopted. This view in the media represented the Arab World as undeveloped, inexperienced, and barbaric, when it is in fact a multi-faceted community that contains multiple different cultures and levels of industrial development.

The images of war and destruction overseas all came together to create an unprecedented media frenzy, such as that in CNN's "Unforgettable Images of 9/11¹¹," which portrays over and over images of the Twin Towers on fire and citizens overcome with emotion. The ensuing frenzy played on the fear that Americans had after 9/11 of an impending terrorist attack. Even the name "War on Terror," denotes that each person in opposition to a vague framework of Western values are savages that deserve discrimination for infiltrating our country with the barbarism of Islam. There is a recognizable ignorance surrounding this sentiment, considering that the entire Muslim community is certainly not to blame for the acts of a small fraction of fundamentalists, just as all Germans are not responsible for the Holocaust. Thus, many Americans are unable to rationalize logically and debunk myths such as this because they are inundated with images of the twin towers falling to the ground in a fiery blaze, followed with images of the cultural "Other:" the Arab World.

Americans let their fear control their rationality because they do not have a sense of control over the random nature of a "terrorist attack." As identified previously, McQueeney states that this association occurs because there is a lack of critical media literacy among students because they are limited in the sources they choose to read:

¹¹ "Unforgettable 9/11 images." CBS News. CBS Interactive, 12 Sept. 2012. Web. 19 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/unforgettable-9-11-images/>>.

“Most of the students I teach have never heard of international news networks such as Al Jazeera or Al Arabiya; nor are they familiar with independent media such as Democracy Now, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Common Dreams, or the BBC.”¹² With the original research I have conducted, I would like to advocate for critical media analysis that includes corroborating facts, assessing statistics, and becoming knowledgeable about the culture that is being questioned by utilizing a variety of news sources.

McQueeney concludes these “claims-makers deploy dominant language and symbols that circulate in the culture to construct social problems,” thus, if a source is zeroing in on a specific population, only those public problems will be represented, regardless of the multitudinous others that may affect a differing population. For example, Democrats are mainly concentrated in Eastern America, whereas Republican states are concentrated in the mid-West.¹³ The east and west, as differing regions with particularly different ideological views and issues address public problems in a different manner than one another, hence why it is important to see all perceptions regarding the issue. Reading only local news and whatever organizations represent your particular political ideology creates ignorance and vacates understanding of other communities and the issues they may also face. In the context of 9/11, Americans’ first experience of the Arab World and Muslims has cast them as “uncivilized and violent” and the “controlling images of Arab and Muslim Others have become further imprinted in the American imagination.”¹⁴

¹² McQueeney. “Disrupting Islamophobia,” 306.

¹³ Gallup, Inc. “Heavily Democratic States Are Concentrated in the East.” Gallup.com. N.p., 03 Aug. 2012. Web. 19 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/156437/Heavily-Democratic-States-Concentrated-East.aspx>>.

¹⁴ McQueeney. “Disrupting Islamophobia,” 306

THE MUSLIM “OTHER” AND HIERARCHY OF NATIONS

Edward Said represents Western exceptionalism in his most accomplished work, *Orientalism*, arguing that orientalism is inexplicably tied to the Imperialist societies who produced it.”¹⁵Culturally, this image of the “Other” has been instituted through Western influence and colonialism, where the Western World has attempted to impose its own cultural values on Eastern countries that have no desire to denounce their rich and vibrant history and replace it with the superficiality of capitalism. Said posits a narrative of cultural dominance that is promoted through cultural depictions of “the Orient” as a savage and barbaric grouping of states. Yaser Ali paraphrases the influence of these representations, stating that “the Orient represented all that was inferior and alien to the West.”¹⁶ Referring to their depictions in literature, Said described ‘Oriental’ persons as “inveterate liars...lethargic and suspicious, and in everything [they] oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race.”¹⁷ Orientalism influenced the Western mindset to adopting Islamophobia and primed its existence before 9/11, identifying that the hysteria occurring after 9/11 was “most likely the product of years of stereotypical media depictions of Muslims- and before that, Arabs- as violent, uncivilized, and inherently opposed to Western ideals (the West).”¹⁸

Furthermore, Ali identifies that the media and Hollywood have worn out time and time again the popular stereotypes of Arabs. Jack Shaheen, author of *Reel Bad Arabs*, *How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, argues that these stereotypes are what have

¹⁵ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books: New York, 1978, pg.1. Print.

¹⁶ Ali, Yaser. “Shariah and Citizenship: How Islamophobia is Creating a Second-Class Citizenry in America.” *California Law Review*. 2012. Pg-1027-1067.

¹⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, pg.13

¹⁸ Ali, “Shariah and Citizenship,”1035.

perpetuated the fear that exploded after 9/11, stating that “filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as public enemy #1-brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural “others” bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews... Arabs are brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women.”¹⁹ These stereotypes often identify a tiny fraction of the Arab community, as does any stereotype, particularly those portrayed in media. Due to this, nothing inspires fear and disgust more than an image of a man wearing a turban.

Given these findings, I would like to present a theory. Differing values does not denote the need for a hierarchy of cultures. The West (i.e. the United States) often idealizes their own picture of prominence in the world because those nations are perhaps more developed, therefore seemingly worthy of greater deference.²⁰ This perspective is damaging, particularly when considering post-colonial theory and our historical conclusions on occupation. It presumes a necessity to assimilate to a culture because it is dominant and powerful. This phenomenon is clear and succinct in the representations of Arabs within Western media, such as the depiction of them as weak individuals that require saving from a barbaric culture of savagery in films: “Each of the remaining films brandished stereotypical depictions of Arab men as notorious villains and womanizing sheikhs” (because Arab men who have gained power and notoriety in their society could not possibly have done it of their own accord), “while Arab women were either hyper

¹⁹ Shaheen, Jack G. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Interlink Publishing Group: Northampton, 2006.

²⁰ "Understanding American Exceptionalism." Harvard Political Review. N.p., 05 Nov. 2015. Web. 19 Mar. 2017. <<http://harvardpolitics.com/united-states/understanding-american-exceptionalism/>>.

sexualized, scantily clad belly dancers, or weak and oppressed objects draped in black robes and desperately seeking liberation by Western heroes.”²¹

In earlier representations of Arabs, these stereotypes were purely based on ethnic “othering.” However, Orientalism has indeed been the foundation of religious stereotyping that has occurred after 9/11. Prior to 9/11, Arabs were the main scapegoat, due to the escalating tensions in the Middle East and the concurring uprisings sustained in the 1980s and 1990s²², yet as time went on and 9/11 was perpetrated, there is a distinct paradigm shift in the way the Muslim “other was characterized. Islamophobia became the new orientalism, identifying that the concerns of a fundamentalist religious population was much more alarming than the previous portrayals of Arabs as undignified savages. 9/11 managed to prove to the world the seriousness of demonization and cultural “othering,” A narrative of oppression and ethnic profiling can have disastrous consequences for the entity instituting inaccurate, stereotypical representations. It is almost as if 9/11 was a response to the unfolding of anti-Muslim rhetoric and the pragmatic switch of demonizing cultures to demonizing the very religion as the cause of these attributions. Creating an exceptional view of the Western World as compared to other cultures creates a carelessness towards humanization of other ethnicities, and further creates unnecessary tension between values that are not necessarily all that contradictory.

²¹ Ali. “Shariah and Citizenship,” 1037.

²² Douglas C., Fischer A., Fletcher K., Guidero A., Marktanner M., Noiset L., Wilson, Maureen. “The Arab Uprisings: Causes, Consequences and Perspectives.” *International Conflict Analysis and Transformation Research Group*. 2014, pg. 3. Print.

An example of this is the Cold War and our disdain with the adoption of communism simply because it contradicted Western democratic values, regardless of its validity in Russia as a cultural construct. The United States imposes these values, yet when Muslims want to come to the United States and adopt these cultural values because they respect our government and would like to be a counterpart of its operation, they are turned away, scorned, and viewed as dangerous individuals. This dynamic represents a historically important power struggle within this hierarchy of nations based on strength of democracy, but also one that is increasingly unnecessary in the face of current globalization movements, and certainly ironic when considering Western attempts of assimilation. Western nations have chosen to perpetuate this struggle by instituting an invisible war (war within the media) against a nonexistent and nonthreatening, vague, and inherently nonviolent²³ enemy.

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IMMEDIATELY AFTER 9/11: REIFICATION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

After 9/11, the rhetoric increasingly became focused on the demonization of Islam rather than Arab identity collectively. The common identity of the hijackers as Islamic fundamentalists bolstered the notion of fear surrounding a religion that many already perceived as primitive and draconian. This degraded the Muslim-American population and therefore attached a stigma of violence to Islam, and not other religious faiths despite historical evidence to the contrary. It is doubtful that if the

²³ The importance of jihad is rooted in the Qurans command to struggle (the literal meaning of the word jihad) in the path of God and in the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his early Companions. In its most general meaning, jihad refers to the obligation incumbent on all Muslims, individuals and the community, to follow and realize Gods will: to lead a virtuous life and to extend the Islamic community through preaching, education, example, writing, etc. Jihad also includes the right, indeed the obligation, to defend Islam and the community from aggression. Esposito, John L. "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?" The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Oxford University Press: 2002. Web. 19 March 2017.

hijackers had been white Christians that people would have demonized the Christian religion and blatantly perpetrate hate crime against all Christians, deny them citizenship rights, and demonize them within the media in the interest of national security. The hysteria was unprecedented, but not unforeseeable in the face of prior orientalism and cultural “othering.” Some perceived the ensuing legislation, such as The Patriot Act²⁴ as costly, ineffective, and discriminatory, as well as the entering into two wars, in which the public was undeniably misled regarding the motivations behind invasion and relying on the legitimate fear and uncertainty of citizens to uphold this “war on terror.” Ali argues that “lawmakers and media pundits directed the nation’s fear of another attack toward Muslims- and those who had physical ‘Muslim’ characteristics- to convince the public that such measures²⁵ were both valid and necessary to prevent another terrorist attack.”²⁶

POST 9/11 MEDIA RHETORIC AND its EFFECTS

Previously, the media maintained a certain credibility in that it did not allow much of the damaging political rhetoric that clearly demonized other cultures to be utilized in reporting and journalism. The shift that occurred was timely, and played on the fear and loss of control that Americans felt after 9/11, displaying political rhetoric that had been unheard of in the previous discourse of orientalism. Ali states that this shift transcended political affiliation, considering one prominent conservative columnist wrote the day after 9/11 that “we should invade their countries, kill their leaders, and convert them to

²⁴ United States of America Patriot Act, 2001.

²⁵ Referring to the Patriot Act, and the “extrajudicial detentions, various privacy invasions in the public and private sphere, and warrantless wiretaps.” (Ali 1042)

²⁶ Ali. “Shariah and Citizenship,” 1043.

Christianity. We weren't punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed civilians. That's war. And this is war."²⁷ Opposing political ideologies joined together to fight this invisible threat, that almost seemed to be an after-the-fact pointless retaliation to amend the avoidance of taking pre-emptive security measures that would have certainly affected the outcome of 9/11, or perhaps would have prevented it from happening at all. A liberal *Washington Post* columnist, Richard Cohen, stated one month after 9/11 that "One hundred percent of the terrorists involved in the Sept. 11 mass murder were Arabs. Their accomplices, if any, were probably Arabs too, or at least Muslims. Ethnicity and religion are the very basis of their movement. It hardly makes any sense, therefore, to ignore that fact."²⁸

The fact that this phenomenon has affected the liberal population as well proves the validity of Islamophobia as a pervasive concept, considering that liberal platforms typically advocate inclusiveness, less tight immigration, and consist of multiple minorities who are affected in some manner by the orientalism that the United States has historically preserved in media rhetoric. Politicians began to utilize the fear of Americans by concerning them with national security issues when the damage had already been done.²⁹ 9/11 occurred because of the United States failing to take pre-emptive measures such as cohesive interagency communication and enhance airport security measures. In hindsight, these failures enabled fundamentalists, who are ultimately fed up with the

²⁷ Statement made by Ann Coulter identified in the Am.-Arab Anti-Discrimination Comm. The report also includes similar statements made by several other elected members of congress as well, such as "If I see someone come in that's got a diaper on his head, and a fan belt wrapped around that diaper on his head, that guy needs to be pulled over." (quoting Representative John Cooksey of Louisiana).

²⁸ Alsultany, E. "Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11." New York: NYU Press, 2012. Project Muse.

²⁹ Mueller, John. *Overblown*. New York: Free Press, 2006.

persistent rhetoric of hatred and divisiveness among cultures and their own cultural “othering,” which may have eternalized the distinct need to prove strength and solidarity within the Arab and Muslim identity.

Post 9/11, politicians from both parties began to utilize anti-Muslim rhetoric, and the media sensationalized the fear and horror of 9/11 coupled with statements from politicians looking to further their own elective agendas through promoting increased national security and a deep contempt for the religion that violently responded to imposition of Western values. Attorney General John Ashcroft gained support for the Iraq War and demonizing Islam comparatively by giving statements such as “Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for him. Christianity is a faith in which God sends his son to die for you,” and “Let the terrorists among us be warned: if you overstay your visa-even by one day- we will arrest you. If you violate a local law, you will be put in jail and kept in custody as long as possible. We will use every available statute. We will seek every prosecutorial advantage.”³⁰ These statements are problematic for many reasons, particularly within the rhetoric they employ.

Firstly, Islam is foundationally known as a religion of peace³¹ that has multiple different sects ascribing to many interpretations of the holy text, the Qur’an. Secondly, stating “the terrorists among us” denotes that Muslims are silently creeping throughout American society, waiting for the perfect time to spring and attack. Realistically, the

³⁰ Ali. Shariah and Citizenship,” 1044.

³¹ Referring to Khan’s nonviolent, peaceful Pashtun movement in the early 20th century: “Unsurprisingly, then, as now, a quizzical world questioned the relationship between Islam and nonviolence, to which Khan quickly countered, “There is nothing surprising in a Muslim or a Pathan [Pashtun] like me subscribing to the creed of nonviolence. It is not a new creed. It was followed fourteen hundred years ago by the Prophet all the time he was in Mecca.” Shank, Michael. “Islam’s Nonviolent Tradition.” The Nation. 16 May 2011. Web. 22 April 2017.

hijackers were incredibly mobile when planning their attacks, and polarized their views in Hamburg, Germany before even attempting to come to the United States. Most of them were here legally on visas obtained to attend flight school, and had been repeatedly allowed in and out of the United States regardless of bureaucratic intelligence that had already identified many of them as affiliates of Al Qaeda. Post 9/11 rhetoric employed the “blame game,” which was a manner for the United States to feign responsibility for an event that was a result of bureaucratic ignorance and disorganization.

The effects of this rhetoric are numerous, but have not subsisted as time has passed. As demonstrated in my findings, effects of anti-Muslim rhetoric and pro-Muslim rhetoric were statistically significant. Results from Gallup polls collectively analyzed by Ali maintain an unprecedented hatred: “according to one poll, less than half of the respondents during the period shortly after 9/11 believed that American Muslims were loyal to the United States. In one particularly troubling Gallup poll shortly after 9/11, one-third of respondents supported such drastic measures as the internment of Arab-Americans or the special surveillance of Arabs living in the United States.”³² Repercussions echoed throughout Muslim-American communities, conserving the hatred and immortalizing it in legislation such as the “Save our State” law (which will be discussed in detail later) and the denial of citizenship rights to Muslim-Americans who had been wrongfully implicated in the causation of the tragedy.

These effects are numerous and, had the population affected been white Americans, would have been decimated as egregious civil rights violations and

³² Ali. “Shariah and Citizenship,” 1045.

inhibitions to certain civil liberties. Ali quantifies this phenomenon, stating that “within two months of 9/11, law enforcement officials detained more than 1200 individuals in dragnet searches, most of whom were from the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa. In 2004 alone, the FBI initiated a campaign to interview 5000 Muslim men to obtain leads on terrorist attacks.”³³ Due to the actions of 19 hijackers, thousands of Muslim-Americans were affected through demonization and lengthy accusations, as well as being implicated in an FBI investigation with no evidence against them other than that their ethnicity coincided with that of the hijackers, and sometimes that is even untrue. As stated above, many people from South Asia and North Africa, were also implicated, implying that the motivations behind these investigations are not only ethnically motivated but religiously motivated. Again, this characterizes the paradigm shift from orientalism and Arab profiling to Islamophobia and Islam-profiling.

The last instance of profiling I will highlight here involved a “United Airlines pilot refusing to fly a U.S. citizen of Egyptian origin out of Tampa, Florida, because his name was Mohammad,” and another situation in which “passengers applauded the removal of two Pakistani men from a flight in Austin, Texas.”³⁴ The hysteria and paranoia surrounding airline flight after 9/11 is certainly understandable, but the manner which these isolated occurrences are sensationalized is damaging. Conversely, sensationalizing of pro-Muslim rhetoric causes Americans to be more tolerant. It is legitimate to maintain be hesitant when getting on a plane because of 9/11. It is illegitimate to fear an entire population. As I have stated previously, Christians are not

³³ Ali, “Shariah and Citizenship,” 1046.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

demonized when deplorable crimes occur in the name of Christendom, so why must we do so with Islam? I can answer this question simply and succinctly; it is because the United States maintains an apparent exceptionalism that is prevalent when providing a hierarchical discourse promoting cultural “othering.” Political actors not only utilized the rhetoric to advance certain national security goals, but implemented “four distinct practices of targeting people who appeared ‘Muslim’: profiling airline passengers, secret arrests, the institution of new race-based immigration policies, and selective enforcement of general applicable immigration laws.”³⁵

ONSET OF DISCRIMINATORY LAWS

Demonization of Muslim-Americans should not be a surprising phenomenon. It occurs because of a systematic, recurrent foundation of exceptionalism and oppression of the “Other.” In the *Outsiders*, Deborah Meyers delves into the immigration law that has stemmed from Islamophobia in American society and its actual effectiveness at protecting national security. She outlines this in a report from the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC), which “concludes that recent policy changes not only have failed to enhance security but also have had particularly detrimental effects among immigrants and asylum seekers, who are among the most vulnerable members of American society.”³⁶ Multiple cases of these effects have been reported to the FIAC, yet a lack of transparency in governmental operations regarding the care of immigrants is prevalent and prevents the proper care of asylum seekers who are searching for security and have most likely faced horrific atrocities in their escape from persecution. Instead of

³⁵ Ali. “Shariah and Citizenship,” 1046.

³⁶ Meyers, Deborah. “The Outsiders.” *Bulletin of Atomic Research*. Nov/Dec. 2005. Pg. 66

being greeted with welcoming arms and acceptance, they are greeted with numerous obstacles and extra-judicial proceedings.

The inhibitory policies “required immigration judges to close certain hearings to the public, further specifying that the hearings should not even be listed on the court docket and that no one else (including family members) be allowed in the courtroom.”³⁷ This is deplorable and implicates immigrants as entities worse than criminals because of this denial of due process. Therefore, the ugly foundation of Islamophobia in America has grown from our own fear to a prevalent viewpoint that even the media cannot be used as a scapegoat for. It is an ugly reality that the public supports policy such as this, but denotes a confusion between the cause and effect of Islamophobia’s persistence in America. Did the media institute this viewpoint or are Americans inherently selfish and divisive?

Another damaging and presumptuous tactic that perpetuates Islamophobia is the disparate treatment of Muslim asylum seekers, considering that those who pass the “credible fear test are required to wear electronic monitoring devices as a pre-requisite to being released pending their asylum hearing.”³⁸ This policy is an extension in action of the damaging rhetoric pertaining to Muslims. People are being treated as if they have committed crimes, which is understandably a preventative measure, but damaging nonetheless to the psyche of the struggling immigrant, who from the get-go is treated as a second-class citizen. The notion of Muslims as a second-class citizen will be discussed later. The irony behind this disparate treatment is that its purpose is to enhance national

³⁷ Meyers, “The Outsiders,” 67

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 67

security, but there is hardly any evidence that post 9/11 policy changes have created a decrease in violent crime or diminished threats to national security. Instead, “the result has been a waste of institutional resources squandered on unnecessary investigations and detentions.”³⁹

The extra-judicial actions that have occurred and exist purely because of this irrational fear perpetuated in the media are numerous and impossible to identify as individual instances because often, immigrant voices are suppressed and given lesser deference than that of an American-born citizen, particularly one whose interests lie in maintaining national security. In one case, “a Miami INS officer told an immigration lawyer he had orders to detain all Arab asylum seekers, even if they were not a security risk, and that his office had no authority to release any Arabs who had been detained.”⁴⁰

This is problematic because it is highly contradictory to American values of democracy and the foundation of our legal system. We put our Western values on a pedestal and advertise them as a liberating concept for asylum seekers. This is exemplified in the inscription on the statue of liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”⁴¹ This sentiment is welcoming, accepting, and speaks to those experiencing oppression abroad, but these words are meaningless and a simple mockery when coupled with the discriminatory manner we treat immigrants, such as the policy stated above.

³⁹ Meyers. “The Outsiders,” 67

⁴⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁴¹ Originally an excerpt from “The New Colossus,” a sonnet that American poet Emma Lazarus wrote in 1883 to raise money for the construction of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. In 1903, the poem was engraved on a bronze plaque and mounted inside the pedestal’s lower level

America, seen as the promised land to many immigrants, portrays values of an exceptionally accepting and forgiving nature. However, when Muslim immigrants arrive, they are presumed to be criminals because of this prevalent anti-Muslim rhetoric, the notion of the Muslim and cultural “Other,” and the domineering nature of American exceptionalism.

The pursuit of specific political goals, such as security is manifested in the creation of policy that unfairly targets perceived security threats. Safrin expresses this, stating, “exceptionalism often flows from its perceived military needs and unique global security responsibilities.”⁴² However, these situations have surfaced because of a notable separatism that qualifies the United States as greater and more influential power within the world, exemplified in our ability to inadvertently influence countries militarily and culturally. A salient example of this that expresses the irony of our interventionist tactics coupled with our denial of overwhelming Western influence is our assistance during the Soviet War in Afghanistan.

The United States, to further their own political interest of preventing the spread of communism, financially and militarily aided Afghani soldiers that would soon polarize towards a fundamentalist rhetoric after the American military dismantled much of the stability in the Middle Eastern region. By giving these resources to unstable governments, the United States unequivocally fueled the ability of violent extremism to take hold in the region. Compared to the later disenchantment with Western values, the United States and the CIA historically “played a significant role in inserting U.S.

⁴² Safrin, Sabrina. “The Un-Exceptionalism of U.S. Exceptionalism.” *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*. 2008. Pg. 1314. Print.

influence in Afghanistan by funding military operations designed to frustrate the Soviet invasion of that country.”

Another example of Western influence and self-interest occurred immediately when George W. Bush announced his campaign in Iraq to further certain foreign policy initiatives, such as combatting the potential for biological warfare and insertion into the domestic policy issues at hand in Iraq concerning Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship. Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11, yet after Bush’s 9/11 presidential address, many Americans were convinced we were fighting a great evil. This introduced the damaging rhetoric that inaccurately portrays the issue at hand, particularly with the use of the phrase “war on terror.” Much of Iraq had nothing to do with combatting terrorism, and more to do with creating an entity to blame for the tragedy that the United States cannot admit had some part in creating. Thus, the notion of exceptionalism may not be uncommon in the international realm, yet recognizing the existence of exceptionalism demonstrated by other countries does not necessitate immediate acquittal of the wrongs that are proffered as a result.

Safrin’s argument is valid, but begs the question of whether special security needs are indeed justified, considering much of our special security needs have fueled tightened immigration and our negative relationship with other cultures, which constantly employs a notion of the United States v. the “Other.” A current comparison of justifiable security needs is between international interest and domestic interest. Preemptive protection abroad, such as refusal to enter the Landmine Convention, identify an important and unique security obligation due to the extenuating circumstances of foreign relations between North Korea and South Korea, for example. A domestic interest is the current,

poorly enacted travel ban, which “keeps refugees from entering the country for 120 days and immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim nations out for three months. The countries affected are Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia.” This is a blatant demonstration of controversial policy that has, instead of maintaining legitimate security concerns, perpetuated a regime of ethnic profiling in depictions of the Muslim world as the “other” and an enemy that must be feared and kept out of the United States.

A prevailing criticism of the ban is that this is keeping asylum seekers out who have a legitimate and credible fear in their home nation, yet those who want to get into the United States to perpetrate whatever constitutes as terrorist acts will be able to maneuver around a bureaucratic block such as this. Consequentially, this rhetoric “represents a continuation of a longer history in which law reinforces racism towards Arab and Muslims and threatens to isolate and alienate one of the fastest growing segments of the American population.”⁴³

Our nation’s confidence in our international intelligence denotes the short-term mindset of the United States, as well as highlights the internal bureaucratic infrastructure issues that enabled the hijackers to obtain entry into the United States and easily plan the attack under the noses of American government officials. The refusal to accept responsibility for not providing preventative measures prior to the attacks identifies the need for a scapegoat, and this is largely resulting from our exceptionally high self-placement within the hierarchy of the developed world. This self-instituted hierarchy guides much of international politics based on the perceived identity of the United States.

⁴³ Ali. “Shariah and Citizenship,” pg. 1027.

Admitting involvement would detract from the image that has been set forth internationally of the United States being a domineering power that has led the industrialized world into modern civilization. At this point, particularly after the 2016 election, Americans cannot remain dignified and place our Western values above Eastern values, because our Western values have equally led us to an extreme, right-wing regime led by an inexperienced businessman who manipulated the public almost the same way a dictator would manipulate the masses in an authoritarian regime. Again, the media has exacerbated the divisiveness that people already perceived within Donald Trump's campaign by employing a rhetoric highlighting America's exceptional nature in the face of great inequality.

Hence, Safrin makes an interesting argument that the Western World in general highlights their exceptionalism on a necessary basis in order to portray themselves as greater than they really are accomplished through applying unjustifiable scapegoats to ethnicities as well as promoting a form of legal exceptionalism in the realm of substantive international law. However, I disagree that the exceptionalism of the United States is not uniquely different from that of other Western nations. Protecting the interests of the people domestically and internationally should not mean demonizing an entire culture because of their dissociation with Western values. We are not protecting anyone from anything, in fact, as identified above, this rhetoric creates more validity in entering the realm of fundamentalism, as well as further marginalizes the most delicate section of our population: immigrants.

In “Shari-ah and Citizenship- How Islamophobia is Creating a Second-Class Citizenry in America, 2012”⁴⁴ Yaser Ali characterizes a history of abuses against Muslim-Americans who practice Islam, as well as suppression of their right to practice. He adopts a “tripartite temporal framework for understanding Islamophobia in its contemporary context- the pre 9/11 period, the period immediately following 9/11, and the period that began during the 2008 presidential campaign.”⁴⁵ He focuses on how the rhetoric has become more dangerous than a partisan representation of right-wing conservatism, but a multi-faceted issue regarding the “subversive relationship between Islamophobia and the erosion of substantive citizenship rights of American Muslims.”⁴⁶ So, not only has this rhetoric clearly damaged the relationship of Americans and Muslims in general, but it has demeaned the fundamental right of American-Muslims (who may even be American citizens) to practice their religion. Many argue that free speech and freedom to practice one’s religion can be suppressed in the interest of national security, yet the salient point here is that national security interests have wrongfully attributed the acts of fundamentalists to a population of innocent individuals that have rights just the same as any white American. The United States has employed a discourse that not only diminishes the importance of cultural and ethnic identity, but accompanies an ongoing battle with the Muslim “Other,” utilizing a tactic of fear to encourage divisiveness. This is clearly denoted in the Oklahoma “Save our State Amendment,” in which State Representative Lewis Moore stated, “Are we not at war with this ideology? Are we not at

⁴⁴ Yaser, Ali. “Shariah and Citizenship-How Islamophobia is creating a Second-Class Citizenry in America.” *California Law Review*. 2012. Pg. 1027-1067. Print.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1032

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1033

war with them? Then why would we give in to this?⁴⁷ This is precisely what is creating disparate treatment for those who are culturally different, but have substantive rights just as any other white, American citizen. The divide furthers the age-old concept of Orientalism and domination of Western values through referring to ethnically diverse populations as “them,” and portraying a mentality that conveys grandeur, life opportunity, and freedom, but comes at the price of sacrificing one’s cultural identity.

Clearly, there are grave constitutional flaws within the text of this amendment, particularly how “the nonexistent threat of ‘Shariah law takeover’ is codified into law in the form of a state constitutional amendment.” The social ramifications of an amendment as such are even more baffling than the creation of the law itself, especially because this type of isolated and targeted discrimination “helped catalyze a phenomenon around the country such that nearly two dozen state legislatures have since proposed similar laws.”⁴⁸

The explosion of Islamophobia results from the friction that occurs between Westerners imposing assimilation and the refusal of the “Other” to assimilate to these values. Is it really necessary to be a functioning member of American society to denounce what creates one’s cultural identity? It is disturbing to say the least that America calls itself a melting pot of diversity, and has attracted diversity as such, but then degrades the very ethnic differences that enable it to dub thee so.

Essentially, Ali outlines what I have dictated in the previous paragraphs, by identifying the roots of Islamophobia as Orientalism and early construction of the concept

⁴⁷ Ali, “Shariah and Citizenship,” 1029

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1031

within American perceptions that have been instituted by the media and the creation of wrongful assumptions about Islam itself.

Policy creation maintains a certain agenda, as I have stated in multiple ways in the above paragraphs. The majority interest typically wins in a marketplace of ideas.⁴⁹ However, what separates us in our political system from other nations is that these interests are motivated by money and driven by the power of interest groups, which often operate in order to further advance the economic interests of members.

Post 9/11, ethnic profiling exploded, as demonstrated above. Arguably, this resulted from the national security agenda at the time and the ongoing war against Oriental values that is still persistent in society today. Public sphere intrusions such as discriminatory laws⁵⁰ are not escapable, but can be changed with the sway of public opinion gravitating towards tolerance and acceptance. Private sphere intrusions such as profiling and discrimination within aspects of daily life are even more damaging, which is what has instituted a long-term psychological detriment for Muslim-Americans. This is unjustified because many identified as fully assimilated American citizens who are not working to their full potential because of job discrimination; the majority of Muslim-Americans are underemployed.⁵¹ This demonstrates that they are indeed worthy of higher-ranking jobs, yet are simply unable to work in these positions because of the marginalization that has taken place since 9/11.

ISLAMOPHOBIA THROUGH THE EYES OF A MUSLIM IMMIGRANT

⁴⁹ Ingber, Stanley. "The Marketplace of Ideas: A Legitimizing Myth." *Duke Law Journal*. (1984): 1-90.

⁵⁰ Such as the Oklahoma "Save Our State" Amendment

⁵¹ <http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/section-1-a-demographic-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>

The novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, by Mohsin Hamid, provides insight into the plight of a Muslim immigrant, and his growing disenchantment with Western values. It follows the growing anti-American sentiment of a Pakistani man named Changez, who is deeply affected psychologically by the way he is treated in America after 9/11, regardless that he had almost completely assimilated and had nothing to do with this tragedy, other than his brown skin. To Americans, his brown skin and beard echoed the words, “Islamist, Shari-a law, and terrorism,” even though he had been a hard worker in a widely known financial firm, contributing to American society more so than most Americans.

This novel accurately and vividly portrays a perspective that most Americans do not even begin to understand or contend with. It is impossible for many Americans to place themselves in the shoes of someone who has been affected by the anti-Muslim rhetoric and Islamophobia that plagues our daily life. Many argue that this is the inability of Americans to accept our blatant un-exceptionalism in the manner which human beings are treated in our nation.⁵² The internal struggle of immigrants in America is vastly underestimated. They are plagued with the threat to assimilate or be implicated as anti-American, which even if they do assimilate, the security of Arab persons in the Western world is still unduly shaken due to physical differences that can never be hidden.

⁵² “A nation that is “exceptional” seeks to apply a legal rule for itself that differs from an existing or emerging international norm as reflected in a multilateral treaty-behavior that might be called, in the words of Harold Koh, pursuit of a double standard. This type of legal exceptionalism differs from the historical understanding of American exceptionalism; credited to Alexis de Tocqueville, which refers to the United States’ perception that it differs qualitatively from other nations due to its unique history, origins, and special political institutions, and that it serves as a beacon to other nations.” (1308-1309) Safrin, Sabrina, The Un-Exceptionalism of U.S. Exceptionalism. *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, Vol. 41, p. 1307, 2008; Rutgers School of Law-Newark Research Paper No. 039. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1018142> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1018142>

Overcoming these obstacles in a society without media focus is difficult enough, but with the added bonus of constant inundation of damaging rhetoric, “blending in” is near impossible. The West should not ask immigrants to blend in and forget their culture to receive the American dream.

Changez is a victim of incredibly unfair, disparate treatment at the hands of his fellow wealthy coworkers after 9/11. He is already faced with a haunting recognition that he is losing his cultural values by delving deeper in pursuit of the American dream, yet this is all lost as he realizes the superficiality of this dream, and what he would lose by denouncing his rich identity as a Pakistani Muslim. The novel presents an argument that coincides with many of the main points within this paper.

The superficiality of the United States is demonstrated through the tedious career of Changez,⁵³ which he eventually resents because it is a meaningless caveat to a more meaningless culture that has robbed him of his ethnicity and personal identity. The propaganda of our capitalist government coupled with a grand system (such as the American media) entrenches a deliberate message to those who are not slaves to luxury. It says, “Come bask in the luxurious comforts that we have in this country, and live the American dream, but give up your values and cultural identity to obtain entrance into our elite society or be called a harbinger of terrorism.” Assimilation is the cost of entrance to American society, and the xenophobic rhetoric that occurs because of American exceptionalism is rather harmful to establishing our legitimacy as a nation. It presents an ironic view of America in the sense that we draw people to our country with the image of

⁵³ Financial analyst at a large firm in New York City

luxury, yet reject immigrants culturally and demean their value when they arrive. As a result, Changez is driven to fundamentalism, and maintains a certain paranoia for the remainder of the novel.

Therefore, the narrative told through Changez's journey tells us a great deal about modern American intentions and the Islamophobia that is constantly present in our society. By providing a perspective of someone who is wrongfully implicated, one can truly understand the motivations of an immigrant who is disenchanted with American society after his entire ethnicity is implicated in worldwide hysteria and paranoia. The many criticisms of America that are provided in this novel, such as the allure of luxury as a means for immigrants to forget their cultural values and assimilate, denote a strong tone of Orientalism and American exceptionalism.

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF ANTI-MUSLIM RHETORIC

It is also noteworthy to mention that, although 9/11 was an unforeseeable tragedy, our foreign relations and tendency to involve ourselves in countries where we have no business involving ourselves created a reasonable sentiment of distaste among foreigners for American society. It is this that makes the disparate treatment ironic, particularly because the West professes acceptance and welcome for asylum seekers, but does not commit to this sentiment in policy-making when they arrive. The decisions by immigration services end up placing Arab-Muslims as the scapegoats for a small, fundamentalist faction that formed in response to the United States imposing Western values on cultures who are unwilling to assimilate, and should not be expected to assimilate regardless. Also, by placing Muslims as second-class citizens, we are driving a population of people that are disenchanted with their disparate treatment to fundamental

extremism. The anti-Muslim rhetoric is fueling a worldwide movement towards polarized terror groups that may not have the momentum that they currently do if we had preached acceptance and integration.⁵⁴ The media lens through which we form perspectives about other cultures is significantly influential in determining level of tolerance for other religions.

In comparison, people view Westboro Baptist Church and its fanaticism as having a foundation of lunacy and fear-inspiring control by a cult leader, Fred Reynolds. Christians, because of this small extremist faction, are consequently not associated with these values. Therefore, these traits of terrorism are applied to the Arab World and Muslim religion because the United States has an agenda in maintaining its image of exceptionalism through demonizing Islam. The media has no financial or social interest in portraying Christianity as a hateful religion and would be negatively affected if they began to employ such rhetoric against Christians. It is easy to dissociate from domestic issues and conclude their existence is a result of a few lunatics who created a cult-like following, yet not easy to admit fault in causing the tragedy that took the lives of many Americans.

DECONSTRUCTING ANTI-MUSLIM RHETORIC

Krista McQueeney utilized a study that represents a focus group type methodology, which is an essential research tool in understanding the mindsets of Americans and what experiences may have swayed these mindsets. She asks students certain questions about their perceptions regarding anti-Muslim rhetorical tools, such as

⁵⁴ Billoo, Zahra. "Anti-Muslim Rhetoric Fuels Fear and Violence." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 15 Dec. 2015. Web. 23 Apr. 2017

terrorism and Shariah law, and what associations they may have regarding these terms. The findings demonstrate that challenging media representations and critically analyzing the stereotypes presented can have positive real-life effects, like less ignorant viewpoints and openness to researching and gaining a fuller perspective on a concept or issue rather than simply believing the presentations given by mass media sources.

McQueeney also discovered that there are many benefits of teaching about Islamophobia and its damaging corrosiveness in American society, racial “otherness,” and policy-making. She states that “providing students with multiple lenses for analyzing social problems, a social constructionist approach, requires them to step out of their preexisting worldviews to consider social problems from different angles.”⁵⁵ It is evident that this must be accomplished to provide a comprehensive view of cultures, but exactly how can we get Americans to think in this manner when the media typically is stating the opposite? It must be made known the underlying reasons for the occurrence of a phenomenon such as Islamophobia, like portrayal of American exceptionalism in the media, military advancement, and loss of control after 9/11. We must teach inclusiveness and critical literacy skills from the get-go, rather than attempt to change hardened perceptions that have resulted from years of reinforcement.

McQueeney’s model was more successful than an expert source because “playing the role of facilitator rather than an expert or authority figure can go a long way in promoting open and relaxed dialogue on uncomfortable topics,”⁵⁶ and racial “othering” is certainly one of those topics because it is something that no one wants to admit they have

⁵⁵ McQueeney. “Disrupting Islamophobia,” 305.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

been a counterpart of. Also, because race is presented as controversial and consequential determination in many situations in government. Due to the impact of studies such as this, it is absolutely essential to remove barriers that inhibit an intensive and comprehensive learning environment, so that students are enabled to view the world in a critical manner, therefore “generating new understandings about the social world.”⁵⁷

From my personal experience in classes, this perspective works in facilitating a discussion that is not censored by social norms. In an ethics class I took, we spoke of many topics that are highly controversial in society, yet they are concurrently topics that everyone has an opinion on because they have often experienced the moral question that has been posited in some manner within their lifestyle. The professor of this class made it very clear that his opinion on the subject had no authority; his authority lies in comprehensively presenting a multi-faceted argument that considers multiple different perspectives on an issue as well as the environment that has produced these circumstances. This is very helpful in formulating my own opinions about a subject after providing textual support because I am given the foundation of facts to justify my argument, but am not presented with a singular view that sways my true opinion on the subject. On a larger scale, this is what the media does. Fear is created in stereotypical representations of Muslims and the portrayal of Islam as violent, which influences that singular viewpoint, and continues to fuel discrimination and hatred of the cultural “other.”

⁵⁷ McQueeney, “Disrupting Islamophobia,” 305

It is important to remember that these representations are deeply rooted in history. The portrayal of the Muslim “other” has been influenced by French and British colonialism, as well as military conflicts such as the Crusades, the Barbary Wars, Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt, the expulsion of Arabs from Palestine in 1948, the Gulf Wars, the “War on Terror,” and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. All these events have demonstratively served to entrench Muslims as the enemy in the minds of Westerners.

Alan Quellien, a prominent figure in the French foreign ministry, posits that Islamophobia is a Western response to the reluctance of Muslim cultures to assimilate, which is a theory I have also presented in the preceding literature. Quellien states that, “For some, the Muslim is the natural born and irreconcilable enemy of the Christian and the European; Islam is the negation of civilization, and barbarism. The Muslim is not the European’s natural born enemy but he can become (his enemy) as a result of local circumstances and notably when he resists armed conquest.”⁵⁸ Therefore, a history of resistance against Western influence and the pressure to assimilate is what has created these inaccurate and offensive representations of Islam and Muslims, rather than a phenomenon that has been founded within the parameters of a legitimate and reasonable fear. The historical significance of cultural “othering” has vastly contributed to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Due to these factors, the proliferation of anti-Muslim rhetoric is irrationally and illogically occurring. If citizens were to take into consideration that a plethora of political tactics have been employed to advance certain military interests, then perhaps we would

⁵⁸ Quellien, Alan. “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All.” Runnymede Trust. 1997.

see a decrease in the discrimination against Muslim-Americans, considering this would provide the understanding that the United States is not the victim in the case of violent extremism. In this deep technological age, there is a guiding force that irrevocably and arguably, influences the opinions of the public for which it serves: the media. Americans are inundated constantly with information, but what is the true effect of utilizing this lens to view cultures globally?

METHODS AND DATA

To uncover the influence of political rhetoric, I created an experiment to determine whether a relationship exists between media and tolerance of Muslims. My methodology consisted of a survey experiment that had three separate conditions. One group was presented with a stimulus of anti-Muslim rhetoric, one was presented with pro-Muslim rhetoric, and the last was presented with nothing to provide a point of comparison among the three groups. To be clear, all my subjects responded to the same questions; the only difference was exposure to one form of rhetoric or neither. My sample consisted of Hood College students obtained by visiting a variety of classrooms across all disciplines. All participation was voluntary, and everyone received an informed consent form as well as a debriefing sheet to describe the purpose of the stimuli if they were presented with one.

My sample included 109 subjects, and predominantly consisted of whites, which made up 76% of the population. The distribution among classes consisted of 39% seniors, 29% juniors, 18% sophomores, and 16% first-years. The ideologies represented include predominantly conservatives and liberals, with smaller populations of moderates and other ideologies. In order to provide a point of comparison between the typical American

population and my sample, data from the Pew Research Center indicates that the United States has an ideological makeup of mainly moderates, who are 35% of the population, and conservatives, who are 30% of the population. My sample is more liberal than the general population, which may perhaps have had some implications on my data that will be discussed later. Here is a breakdown of the American population’s ideologies compared to my sample:

TABLE 1: IDEOLOGY OF MY SAMPLE VS. THE UNITED STATES

IDEOLOGY	MY SAMPLE	PEW RESEARCH CENTER
VERY CONSERVATIVE	6.4%	10%
CONSERVATIVE	24.8%	30%
MODERATE	22.9%	35%
LIBERAL	31.2%	15%
VERY LIBERAL	13.8%	6%
OTHER	4.6%	4%

The survey containing the pro-Muslim rhetoric⁵⁹ depicted an accepting and tolerant attitude towards Muslim-Americans. One of the questions posed after the respondents were asked to read the statements asked which of the following quotes received the most media attention in your opinion. The most common answer was the first quote, which was made by Hillary Clinton in response to the growing anti-Muslim rhetoric used in Donald Trump’s campaign. This demonstrates the polarization of rhetoric

⁵⁹ Full text of survey can be found in Appendix A.

within political platforms and how many people recognize statements that have been depicted in the media in a number of ways. I asked this question in order to ensure that my subjects cognitively engaged with the stimulus. It inadvertently also represented another phenomenon; those quotes that respondents rated as receiving the most media attention actually did receive the most media attention, proving that priming and framing matters within the scope of information environment.

Next, the survey with the anti-Muslim rhetoric⁶⁰ had all the same questions as that of the pro-Muslim rhetoric, but instead depicted an attitude of intolerance and promoted discrimination of Muslim-Americans. This group was also asked to identify the quote that received the most media attention. Many respondents answered quote three. This quote is from Donald Trump, which again, represents how rhetoric is often polarized and the rhetoric that is most prevalent in our information environment is most influential. However, just because rhetoric is prevalent and proliferate, this does not mean that people will take on the viewpoint that is being presented. This will be demonstrated in my findings shortly.

FINDINGS

Relationships were noted between exposure to the stimuli and the dependent variables of tolerance for Muslims and tolerance for Muslim-Americans. These were the two variables most significantly affected by the stimuli. Two other variables, attitudes towards Islam and safety of American citizens, were slightly affected, but not enough to report statistical significance. There were no significant findings to report on tolerance

⁶⁰ Full text of survey can be found in Appendix B

for other groups listen among the variables of Muslims and Muslim-Americans, which identifies that there was indeed an effect on the perception of Muslims because of the stimuli which was presented.

After the stimuli was presented, one of the questions asked to rate a list of groups from 0-100, 0 being the least favorable and 100 being the most favorable. No significance was noted for variables other than attitude toward Muslims, which identified that those who received the positive stimulus rated Muslims significantly greater than that of the control. The control rated Muslims at an average of 63⁶¹, whereas those who received the pro-Muslim rhetoric rated Muslims at an average of 72. Here, the p-value is 0.065, which denotes statistical significance because it is less than the value of 0.1. The experimental effects on attitudes towards Muslims correlates with the finding that Americans are influenced much more by pro-Muslim rhetoric than anti-Muslim rhetoric, and view the group in a more positive light when they have been primed accordingly.

TABLE 2: EXPERIMENTAL EFFECTS ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS MUSLIMS

Experimental Condition	Feeling Thermometer for Muslims-Mean
POSITIVE	72.26*
NEGATIVE	59.72*
CONTROL	63.00*

*p=0.065, p<0.1, data is statistically significant

The experimental effects on tolerance of a Muslim as your child’s school teacher also indicate a similar relationship. Respondents were asked how they would feel if a

⁶¹ See Table 2

Muslim was their child’s school teacher, and to rate this tolerance from extremely threatened-welcoming. 37.5%⁶² of the control group stated they would have a welcoming attitude towards this occurrence, compared to 56.8% within the group that received the pro-Muslim rhetoric. This demonstrates a significant increase in tolerance for those who received the pro-Muslim rhetoric. The p-value again proves statistical significance, considering it is at a value of 0.086. This variable also presented an interesting phenomenon that cannot be overlooked; precisely that the anti-Muslim rhetoric was positively affected compared to the control. 42.5% of those who received the anti-Muslim rhetoric also said they would be welcoming towards a Muslim school teacher, which is an odd finding that I will discuss more in my conclusions. In short, I think it is a function of my liberal college-age sample which largely dismisses Trump’s anti-Muslim rhetoric, considering they indeed recognized the origin of the statements in the anti-Muslim stimulus.

TABLE 3: EXPERIMENTAL EFFECTS ON TOLERANCE OF MUSLIM AS TEACHER

	EXTREMELY THREATENED	SLIGHTLY THREATENED	NEUTRAL	NOT THREATENED	VERY THREATENED
POSITIVE	0%*	0%*	8.1%*	35.1%*	56.8%*
NEGATIVE	0%*	7.5%*	22.5%*	27.5%*	42.5%*
CONTROL	3.1%*	0%*	12.5%*	46.9%*	37.5%*

*p=0.086, data is statistically significant with a p-value of <0.1

⁶² See Table 3

Again, a similar phenomenon is noted in a question asking respondents to rate the likelihood of an attack by Muslim-Americans from very likely-very unlikely. 15.6%⁶³ of the control group stated that an attack is highly unlikely, compared to 40.5% in the pro-Muslim rhetoric group. The positive rhetoric continues to be significant, but also is significant within the anti-Muslim group. Again, the rhetoric was disenchanting to most of this group, considering there was about an 18% increase in the anti-Muslim group of those who believe an attack is very unlikely. The p-value demonstrates the significance of the experimental effects, considering it is at a value of 0.069.

TABLE 4: EXPERIMENTAL EFFECTS ON PERCEIVED THREAT OF MUSLIMS

	VERY LIKELY	LIKELY	NEUTRAL	UNLIKELY	VERY UNLIKELY	NO KNOWLEDGE
POSITIVE	5.4%*	2.7%*	24.3%*	18.9%*	40.5%*	8.1%*
NEGATIVE	5.1%*	10.3%*	25.6%*	17.9%*	33.3%*	7.7%*
CONTROL	0%*	31.3%*	25.0%*	25.0%*	15.6%*	3.1%*

p=0.069, data is statistically significant at a value of <0.1

Other than the variables previously described, there were a couple that demonstrated an effect, but not one great enough to report statistical significance. However, these experimental effects are still substantively interesting. Respondents were asked to rate a list of religions on their perceived level of extremism, from somewhat extreme-very extreme. 37.5%⁶⁴ of the control group rated Islam as very extreme. Also, the anti-Muslim group demonstrated a similar effect as the variables previously described, and maintained a 15% decrease in the frequency that they reported Islam as

⁶³ See Table 4

⁶⁴ See Table 5

very extreme. Therefore, even though this is not statistically significant at a p-value of 0.135, it is still substantively interesting because it approaches statistical significance representing the same phenomenon as the variables that were below a value of 0.1. This effect may not have been as prominent due to my small sample size.

TABLE 5: EXPERIMENTAL EFFECTS ON ISLAM AS EXTREME

	NOT EXTREME	SOMEWHAT EXTREME	VERY EXTREME
POSITIVE	35.1%*	51.4%*	10.8%*
NEGATIVE	30.0%*	47.5%*	22.5%*
CONTROL	21.9%*	40.6%*	37.5%*

p=0.135, not statistically significant but substantively interesting

Another variable that came rather close to statistical significance at a p-value of 0.119⁶⁵ is the safety of American citizens. Respondents were given a list of statements and asked to gauge their level of agreement from strongly agree-strongly disagree. The experimental effects denote that those who received the pro-Muslim rhetoric were less likely to strongly agree with this statement than that of the control. The same effect occurred for those who received the anti-Muslim stimulus. Therefore, these variables all promote a similar trend: that information environment matters and influences the tolerance and attitudes towards Muslims, whether it be pro-Muslim or anti-Muslim.

TABLE 6: EXPERIMENTAL EFFECTS ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS AMERICAN SAFETY

⁶⁵ See Table 6

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE
POSITIVE	35.1%*	37.8%*	10.8%*	10.8%*	5.4%*
NEGATIVE	46.2%*	30.8%*	17.9%*	5.1%*	0.0%*
CONTROL	65.6%*	21.9%*	6.3%*	0.0%*	6.3%*

The importance of research like this cannot be understated. It is vital to understanding the origins of our attitudes towards cultural “others,” and how our exposure to political rhetoric can affect the perceptions of ethnicities in American society.

Political rhetoric in the media environment can influence attitudes towards Muslims significantly, which is represented in the preceding data. Furthermore, pro-Muslim rhetoric concerning Muslims can increase political tolerance among Americans. Also, in this specific sample, anti-Muslim rhetoric actually led subjects to more accepting attitudes relative to the control in some cases. This was not something I expected at all. In fact, I expected, the anti-Muslim rhetoric to have a much more disparate impact compared to the control and the pro-Muslim rhetoric, simply because I was attempting to determine why Islamophobia persists when no real threat is rationally imminent. I think the more accepting attitudes occurred as a result of disenchantment with Trump’s rhetoric among my liberal population. Many respondents read the statements and attributed them to Trump, which made them even more polarized to a welcoming and tolerant attitude. I think this effect was also a function of my small, liberal sample, which was generally tolerant and accepting of Muslims across all variables. Here, it is possible that a liberal college-age student read the anti-Muslim rhetoric and were so opposed to the sentiments

it contained, making them even more tolerant perhaps because they see that type of rhetoric damaging to the overall psyche and productiveness of society.

Considering the history of discrimination outlined in the review prior to my findings, it is interesting that tolerance is increasing as time goes on. This may be a function of intense disenchantment with disparate treatment of Muslim immigrants among a liberal college population. Awareness of a history of mistreatment may have changed the perspective of students who want to focus on forming a more inclusive and tolerant society. Also, it is important to note that the response outlined with laws and stories of discrimination above occurred directly after an unpredictable tragedy. As the effect of 9/11 fades with the passing of time, so will the demonization of the Muslim community, particularly even more so if Americans further educate themselves about the implications behind media reports that sensationalize the existence of a threat. Critical media analysis is incredibly important to forming an accurate narrative regarding global perspectives.

I think the more generalizable take away from my project is the fact that pro-Muslim rhetoric matters. Media spent a lot of time replaying anti-Muslim rhetoric during the 2016 campaign and democratic scholars were quite concerned about that, but what went unnoticed and uncelebrated is the fact that pro-Muslim rhetoric can have a positive influence if it is employed in a daily media environment. Therefore, information environment is incredibly vital to promoting acceptance of Muslims and Islam in society, as well as to debunking the stereotypes that have been ingrained in mindsets through historical events.

APPENDIX A

Political Attitudes Questionnaire

1. Please circle your ethnicity (or race).
 - a. White
 - b. Hispanic/ Latino
 - c. Black/ African-American
 - d. Native American/ American Indian
 - e. Asian Pacific Islander
 - f. Biracial/Multiracial
 - g. Other
2. Education: What is your college class? *If you have received higher or lower than an undergraduate education, please indicate in the box labeled "other."*
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Other: _____
3. Please circle where you would place yourself on the political spectrum.
 - a. Strong Republican
 - b. Leaning Republican
 - c. Independent
 - d. Leaning Democrat
 - e. Strong Democrat
 - f. Other (please specify): _____
4. Which of the following do you turn to for news? Circle all that apply.
 - a. Facebook
 - b. Twitter
 - c. Instagram
 - d. Snapchat
 - e. Newspaper
 - f. Internet News Sites
 - g. Television
 - h. Radio
 - i. None of these
5. Here is a list of religious groups. Please read over the list and place an X next to any group (s) you affiliate yourself with.

Mainline Protestants		Buddhists		Catholics		None	
Jews		Muslims		Evangelical Protestants		Spiritual, but not religious	

If you are affiliated with a religion other than the groups listed, please indicate your affiliation: _____.

6. How often do you read or listen to political news?

never	
rarely	
sometimes	
often	

7. Please circle the ideology (or ideologies) that is/are most closely associated with your views.

- a. Very conservative
- b. Conservative
- c. Moderate
- d. Liberal
- e. Very liberal
- f. Other, *Please specify:* _____.

Please read carefully the following statements regarding current political attitudes held by public figures:

1. We must work more closely with Muslim-American communities... I met with a group of Muslim-Americans this past week to hear from them about what they're doing to try to stop radicalization. They will be our early warning signal. That's why we need to work with them, not demonize them."

2. "I believe that the United States has the moral responsibility with Europe, with Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia to make sure that when people leave countries like Afghanistan and Syria with nothing more than the clothing on their back that of course we reach out."

3. "If the big banks expect to buy influence when they give money to favored think tanks, then the public has a right to know. If the big banks don't expect to buy influence and are merely making charitable contributions, then their shareholders have a right to know. Either way, there's no excuse for keeping these payments secret."

4. "You've got 300,000 kids who don't go to school at all, maybe 100,000 teenage boys who were traumatized and bored and humiliated and borderline illiterate. What are they going to do if they're still here in two or three years?" (regarding the Syrian refugee crisis)

5. "But at least we left the prospect of death in Syria. So if you escape death of course you're happy. We know we have a difficult life ahead, but we escaped death."

Now, please answer this question about what you have just read.

- 8. Which of the above quotes do you think received the most media attention?**
- a. Quote 1**
 - b. Quote 2**
 - c. Quote 3**
 - d. Quote 4**
 - e. I am not sure.**

Now, please answer the following questions about political ideas and groups.

9. Suppose an individual wanted to make a speech in your community. Should the following individuals be allowed to speak, or not?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Anarchist					
Member of the Military					
Racist					
Feminist					
Buddhist					
Evangelical Protestant					
Muslim					
Jew					
Donald J. Trump Supporter					

10. Rate the following religions on a scale of extremism.

	Not extreme	Somewhat extreme	Very extreme
Protestantism			
Judaism			
Islam			
Catholicism			
Buddhism			

11. Would you feel threatened if your child's school teacher was a:

	Extremely threatened	Slightly threatened	Neutral	Not threatened	Welcoming
Protestant					
Jew					

Muslim					
Catholic					
Buddhist					

12. Please rank the likelihood (in your eyes) of an attack in the United States by the following groups. *If you have no knowledge or opinion of the group, leave the row blank.*

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Very unlikely
Westboro Baptist Church					
Boko Haram					
Al Qaeda					
Muslim-Americans					
Refugees					
ISIS					

13. How often do you interact with those of other cultures/religious backgrounds? Please rank them below.

	Very often	Somewhat often	Not often	Never
Protestant				
Jew				
Muslim				
Catholic				
Buddhist				

14. Does an increase in the amount of immigrants in the United States make you feel:

- a. Very anxious
- b. Somewhat anxious
- c. Not very anxious
- d. Not at all anxious

15. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	disagree
Increasing taxes for the wealthy is a necessary policy change.					
The United States needs to crack down on immigration.					
The first priority in government is the safety of American citizens.					
The United States needs to keep a closer eye on the growth of terrorist cells.					
Many Muslims moving to the United States support ISIS.					
Refugees bring the possibility of terrorism in the United States, therefore settlement should never be lawful.					
We should let anyone come to the United States, regardless of the circumstances.					

16. Please rate the following individuals, groups, or organizations on a scale from 0-100, where 0 is most unfavorable, 100 is most favorable, and 50 is neutral. You may use the entire 0-100 scale. If you have no knowledge or opinion of the person or group, please place an X on the corresponding line.

George W. Bush		Barack Obama		Mahmoud Abbas	
Bernie Sanders		Vladimir Putin		Benjamin Netanyahu	
Illegal Immigrants		Poor people		National Rifle Association	
Jews		Muslims		Buddhists	
Donald J. Trump		Homosexuals		Hillary Clinton	
Environmentalists		Wealthy people		Feminists	

17. Please indicate whether the following statements are true or false.

President-Elect Donald Trump lost the vote of the electoral college, but won the popular vote.	
Republicans control both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives.	
Same-sex marriage is now legal in every state in the United States.	
John Roberts is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.	

APPENDIX B

Political Attitudes Questionnaire

1. Please circle your ethnicity (or race).
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