

Islamophobia: ignorance and bigotry at the social level

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, hate crimes against American Muslims saw a dramatic spike—a 1600% increase (Serrano).

Despite President George W.

Bush's confirmation of the peaceful nature of Islam and assurances that its followers were not to blame for the national catastrophe, ten years later this unearned resentment not only persists but thrives in the minds of a staggering number of people in America and beyond. Mosques set afire, girls expelled from schools for wearing the veil, men attacked and tear gassed for public displays of worship: the hatred and fear of Muslims has become a commonplace occurrence on an international scale. Islamophobia is bigotry at its finest and most unjustifiable; the unfortunate product of the lack of understanding people have regarding Islam and the motives of its practitioners. This view, deeply rooted in the hearts of too many communities, makes a massive scapegoat out of a revered religious group, assigns undeserved blame to it, and must ultimately be combated by educating the public with medicine they might necessarily be inclined to swallow on their own: the truth. Analyzing the Origins of Islamophobia Though many believe the rise of Islamophobia to be an effect exclusively caused by the events of September 11th, the fear and distaste of Muslims and their religion had been prevalent well before the terrorist attacks.

According to a report by the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), the attacks simply “ gave a pre-existent prejudice a much greater credibility and validity” or, in essence, a justification (Allen, 14). For some, especially those familiar with metamorphic history of xenophobia and discrimination, the nature of Islamophobia hasn't actually <https://assignbuster.com/islamophobia-ignorance-and-bigotry-at-the-social-level/>

changed much because of 9/11, and is easily comparable with other forms of cultural, racial, or religious biases, such as anti-Semitism (Allen 14). The Crusades, the series of ancient territorial conflicts between Christians and Muslims over the sanctified Holy Land (modern day Israel and Palestine) may have played a crucial role in the nurturing of early inklings of Islamic discrimination, while also kindling an enmity between the two religious factions that would persist through modern day. Scholars such as Milton-Edwards back this theory, and still others expand on it by claiming the reason for most Islamophobic events being concentrated in Western and European nations is because those nations house a Christian majority (Allen 14). Attacks committed by Muslims, such as 9/11 or the train bombings in Madrid, Spain, punctuate Islamophobia's track record by essentially adding lighter fluid to a dying fire. They foster periods of increased Islamophobic activity, whereas prior to such events Islamophobic activity would be at a minimal or "normal" level—as normal as hate violence can be (Allen 14-15).

Fostering the Association Between Terrorism and Islam Anyone could tell you that after reviewing this cyclic theory that the problem is, of course, the fact that Muslims are committing such crimes in the first place. These actions not only result in lost lives (and in some cases property damage), but also aggravate the state of hate violence, social discrimination, and political scrutiny that so many Muslims are forced to face. But why are such attacks, often dubbed terrorist attacks, always pinned to the collar of Islam rather than on the individuals who committed them? To make such an illogical connection would be no different than if a Christian man were to commit murder, and Christianity would be held accountable simply because of the

<https://assignbuster.com/islamophobia-ignorance-and-bigotry-at-the-social-level/>

man's religious affiliation. The already-prevalent reality of 9/11 in Western society and smaller events of similar nature in European society, combined with the unbreakable affiliation between politics and mass media, is perhaps the most influential factor contributing to the synonymy between terrorism and Islam. Since Islam already has a negative connotation with the majority of westerners not only because of 9/11, but also the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the infamous tyrannical regimes often present in Islamic states, it is only natural that both political and media institutions would take advantage of this majoritarian view to gain support by appealing to the public. Though it is the nature of politics and large businesses to promote what will garner the most support and funds, in this case this practice is having disastrous effects.

Hollywood movies *The Hurt Locker* and *Four Lions* both present Muslims in a harshly negative light, with the former concentrating on fictitious atrocities committed by Muslims during wartime and the latter following the malicious plans of four Muslim protagonists (<http://mediamanrickimest3.blogspot.com/2011/05/does-media-industry-promote.html>). Bias against Islam is also extremely prevalent in right-wing media institutions, such as Fox News, who were perhaps the biggest critics of the alleged "Ground Zero Mosque" (which is actually more than two blocks away from the Ground Zero site), and have a reputation for hosting anti-Islam activists such as Center for Security Policy's Frank Gaffney and Jihad Watch's Robert Spencer ("Reports on Islamophobia Highlights Role Played by Right-Wing Media"). As directly accounted by Khaled Abou el Fadl in his highly accredited work, *The Great Theft*, "No aspect of Islamic religion is.

<https://assignbuster.com/islamophobia-ignorance-and-bigotry-at-the-social-level/>

.. all over the media...

as much as the issue of jihad and terrorism." As previously mentioned, events like 9/11 have undoubtedly aggravated the state of anti-Islamic activism, violence, and discrimination. But what's stopping the cyclic theory from taking over? It has been over ten years, and the spike in Muslim-targeted hate violence hasn't even begun to settle to minimal levels, as history demands. Because of the persistence of far-right conservative politicians and the right-wing media institutions they do business with, Islamophobia in America has failed to reach the point of decline and has instead been viciously egged on. And the problem of fire starting doesn't stop at the conservative media and political institutions.

A portion of the blame can be laid on the political and scholarly institutions within Muslim states, wherein interpretations of the Holy Qur'an and Hadiths¹ widely vary and are sometimes manipulated. Abou el Fadl states: ... In the modern era, Muslims have suffered a crisis of authority that has deteriorated to the point of full-fledged chaos. There are reasons for this that I will explain, but for now it is important to not that in the house of Islam, which includes any area where Muslims live, whether in Muslim countries or not, there are numerous parties who pretend to speak on God's behalf but too few who are willing to listen.

Unlike other religions like Roman Catholicism, who are spiritually led by the Pope, Muslims must guide themselves because there is no authority figure to essentially 'lead' the Muslim community and dictate how it functions. Many followers depend on their families or Muslim scholars, who may make

<https://assignbuster.com/islamophobia-ignorance-and-bigotry-at-the-social-level/>

translation, transliteration, or interpretative mistakes in deciphering the meanings of Islam simply out of human error, or with mischievous or subliminal motives (Abou el Fadl, 26-28). With so many personal claims spread through the Muslim community, some become contradictory of each other, or even contradictory of the true meanings and messages behind Islam, ultimately contributing to the fire of Islamophobia. The Reality of Terrorism When viewed through the lens the media has forged for the public, Islam is as horrible and bigoted as ice is cold: it is easy to see how the majority of westerners have maintained such a bellicose attitude toward the Muslim population. But in actuality, according to an official FBI report, only 6% of terrorist attacks in the United States, from 1980-2005, were perpetrated by Muslims (Danios). Official data from Europol's EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) indicated that from 2006-2008 (the only years in which data was available), Muslims accounted for only 0.

4% of all terrorist attacks in the European Union (Danios). Europol's updated data for 2009 and 2010 show that out of " a grand total of 543 terrorist attacks... only 4 were committed by Muslims," or only 0. 7% of attacks in the EU (Danios).

The Pew Research Center conducted a 2011 poll to gain insight into the prevalence of radical Islamic views in the U. S. Only 5% of Muslim-Americans were in favor of al-Qaeda (2% very, 3% somewhat), and a staggering 81% found al-Qaeda's actions and motives unfavorable (70% very, 11% somewhat), while 14% of the sample chose not to respond to the survey (Rusin). These hard facts, enough to prove on their own the innocence of the

overwhelming majority of Muslims, is still insufficient in the face of the West's powerfully opinionated, biased media. The Consequences of Islamophobia, and How to Remedy It A survey reports that more than 25% of American Muslims have endured manifestations of Islamophobia, whether verbal or physical (Faliq, 5). And these aren't just grown adults, toughened by life's challenges in the face of adversity: children and teens also face subjugation in and outside of school, particularly females on account of wearing the hijab, or veil.

Repetitive, harsh treatment at such early ages not only puts the child's mental health and development at risk, but also may cultivate a negative view of western society, deepening the fissure that contemporary Islamophobia has begun to carve between Muslim-Americans and other Americans. It is a natural human response to resent, fear, and seek to fight an entity that attacks you—especially on a constant basis—and if Islamophobia isn't quelled in the future, the fictitious suspicions of westerners may become more and more like reality. The unprovoked stabbing of a Muslim cab driver in New York, the arson attack against a Tennessee mosque construction site, the vandalizing of a California Islamic center, a proposed “ International Burn a Qur'an Day” holiday, and countless other transgressions (“ Increase in Crimes Against Muslims”). How can they all go unaddressed in the United States, a country built upon the profound principles of freedom, justice, and equality for all in spite of race, gender, or religion? The proof of Muslim innocence must be shared. The media has always focused on what's wrong with the world, peppered with the

occasional local tale of good will to lift the spirits of viewers: it's long past due for a change.

News from television, newspapers, radio and the Internet are the average citizen's primary, and in some cases only, sources of information. The only way to bring a lasting end to the unrelenting cycle of Islamophobia is to rid the media institutions of their bigotry, to restore the balance between the First Amendment's freedom of religion and freedom of speech, and to get the message out through the reformed news stations and newspapers. There will always be discrimination in the world, but to sit by while it runs rampant in our own backyard, in a democratic country, is to do honesty, fairness, and humanity itself a ghastly disservice. The truth must not only be heard, but understood.