

Perspective  
complicating human  
interaction in zeitoun  
and the laramie  
project



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Each person has a unique worldview, which is largely shaped by one's environment, knowledge, beliefs, and more. Those who identify similarly are largely grouped with others who may have the same background. Both Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* and David Egger's *Zeitoun* explore the relationship between majority groups and minority groups: In *Zeitoun's* case, a committed belief in Islam versus a largely Christian America, and in Matthew Shepard's case, an open identification with the LGBT community versus the straight population. These two individuals faced prejudice due to intrinsic aspects of who they are, which appeared to overshadow the rest of their being and lead to discrimination. Prejudiced perspectives are born out of both fear, and the influence of an individual or groups' environment; this prompts conflict with minority groups in society, complicating human interaction.

The individuals who discriminated against Matthew Shepard due to his sexual orientation were afraid of being associated with homosexuality, while both individuals and the government as a whole were prejudiced against *Zeitoun*, fearing malice and terrorism. The end of the third act of *The Laramie Project* focuses on the trial of Aaron McKinney. During his trial, the prosecution plays a tape of his confession, in which Rob DeBree, the chief investigator of Matthew's murder, interrogates him. When asking Aaron what happened after Matt got in the car with him and Russell, he claims Matt started to grab his genitals. He defends himself, saying "' Look, I'm not a fuckin' faggot. If you touch me again you're gonna get it'"; a few minutes later, DeBree asks if he hates gay people. Aaron responds, " I don't hate [gay people] but you know, when they start coming on to me and stuff like that I get pretty

aggravated” (Kaufman 527). Although Aaron claimed he didn’t hate gay people, he felt like his masculinity was being challenged during this encounter, which brought out an intense feeling of insecurity and discomfort. Aaron’s defensive response indicated that he was afraid to be associated with homosexuality in any way. This could be due to the fear of societal judgment, especially in a relatively “ old fashioned” and religious town where preachers spread the idea of eternal damnation in hell for homosexuals. Aaron’s perspective of what it means to be a gay man is skewed as a result of his fear; by viewing all homosexuals the same way and grouping them, he creates conflict with this minority group. He acts upon the unease he experiences, morphing it into anger and hate. In Zeitoun, after the National Guard forcefully brings Zeitoun to “ Camp Greyhound”, Zeitoun is initially astonished and confused. He becomes increasingly more afraid as Todd asks a passing soldier why they’re here, and the soldier says that they are al Qaeda. In some ways, Zeitoun had been waiting for this day since 9/11, when “...he and Kathy knew that many imaginations had run amok, that the introduction of the idea of “ sleeper cells”... meant that everyone at their mosque, or the entire mosque itself, might be waiting for instructions from their presumed leaders in the hills of Afghanistan or Pakistan” (Egger 212). Zeitoun had always known this was a possibility due to the increased fear of the American citizens and government after the transformative terrorist attack that put many on high alert. Since the act was committed by an Islamic extremist group, Islamophobia has increased ever since. Islamic people soon became highly associated with terrorism, and paranoia ensued. Although the American people have the right to feel afraid of any group or person who presents a clear threat of danger, many have taken this fear too

<https://assignbuster.com/perspective-complicating-human-interaction-in-zeitoun-and-the-laramie-project/>

far, forgetting that extremist views in the Islamic community is far less common than it may seem and that many Muslim Americans do not have any ties to Afghanistan or Pakistan. This perspective of the Islamic people has created conflict with many innocent Muslims such as Zeitoun.

Generalizing an enormous group of people has proved to complicate human interaction, for fear tends to cloud one's judgement and turn groups of people against one another. The same can be said for Aaron and Russell; they were, among other things, afraid of association with homosexuals. This fear led to irrationality, which led to further conflict and violence.

Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson's environment negatively shaped their beliefs; in addition, the state of New Orleans during Katrina was part of the US government's environment, prompting institutionalized prejudice against Zeitoun. Act II of *The Laramie Project* begins with an account of how the media arrived in Laramie after the news story about Matthew was released. After a few interviews with the residents of Laramie, reporters invade the stage. They speak about the background of Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, with News person 2 claiming they "...came from the poor side of town. Both were from broken homes and as teenagers had had run ins with the law..." (Kaufman 506). Aaron and Russell's childhood experiences shaped them to be the people who killed Matthew Shepard. Coming from the "poor side of town", they likely did not have access to the education and resources available to the "richer side of town". They would have been surrounded by similar people, and thus would have been encouraged to stay in their current mindsets, conform to their community, and embrace their arguably immoral attitudes and values. Instead of seeking

better opportunities elsewhere or even in their own community, they allowed the hardship of being poor to envelop them, angering them and shaping their prejudiced beliefs. Being poor, they may have also felt the need to prove their power. Although this was not necessarily their fault, they acted on their discriminatory perspectives, inciting conflict with Matthew, the Laramie community, and the entire LGBT community across America. The end of Zeitoun clarifies the government's purpose in arresting Zeitoun. Kathy finds out that as Katrina was approaching, a document was spread to law-enforcement agencies and National Guard units in the region, written by representatives of Homeland Security, the CIA, Marines, and corporate security firms. The committee "...had been asked to 'speculate on possible terrorist exploitation of a high category hurricane'" (Eggers 308). The American government created an entire committee dedicated to "hunting" potential terrorists rather than of focusing on the larger issue at hand. Hurricane Katrina created a situation in which America's typically safe, first world environment failed its citizens. Although creating this committee may have seemed like a necessary precaution, the government did not execute the program well, leading to stereotyping. This committee's perspective created an unfortunate and unjust situation for many Muslim Americans such as Zeitoun, who was like any other citizen terrorized by the storm. In both cases, the environment had a large role in complicating human interaction and creating conflict targeting minority groups. However, these factors are not solely responsible for the pain inflicted on Matthew, the Laramie community, and Zeitoun and his family. The government knew this type of committee and stereotyping could lead to trouble. Ultimately, it was each

person's and group's conscious decision to create conflict with these minority groups.

Factors such as fear of a minority group and environmental situations shape discriminatory perspectives, which causes conflict. This conflict allows people to make inferences about human nature as a whole, on a larger scale.

Although human conflict is easily spurred as a result of a diverse collection of differing opinions, a large amount of differing perspectives is essential to the exchange of ideas and positive change. It carries initially negative implications, but also encourages human interaction, allowing social topics present in all people's lives to take the stage, pushing movements that create meaningful change. Issues such as homophobia and Islamophobia are entirely relevant today; when confronting these topics, all perspectives should be taken into account and continue to change through education and discussion.