

## ABSTRACT

### Arab American Racialization and its Effect on American Islamophobia

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Over the past few years, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab rhetoric and discrimination has surged. Prejudice against Arabs and Muslims has moved from the fringes of American society to the mainstream. The American Islamophobic discourse is so deeply rooted in U.S. history, culture, and society that we often misunderstand its origins as well as its manifestations. This paper proposes a critical dialogue about how to understand one contested concept (Islamophobia) by using another contested one (racialization). This paper seeks to understand if--and if so, to what extent--racialization is central to understanding America's pernicious brand of Islamophobia. In addition to reviewing the historical connection between racialization and Islamophobia, this paper analyzes the results of a survey of Texans' views of Islam and Muslims. The survey results are used to understand how racialized conceptions of Arab Muslims correspond with Islamophobic tropes.

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ARAB AMERICAN RACIALIZATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON AMERICAN  
ISLAMOPHOBIA

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pre ace	iii
Chapter One: What is Racialization?	1
Chapter Two: Arab Americans: A Brief History of Immigration and Racial Formation	14
Chapter Three: The Racial Re-formation of Arabs in the United States	28
Chapter Four: From Racialization to Islamophobia	38
Chapter Five: Survey Results	54
Concluding Thoughts	63
Appendix: Survey Questions	67
Bibliography	73

## PREFACE

During the 2016 presidential election cycle, now President Donald Trump stubbornly called into question former President Barack Obama's birthplace and faith. As the campaign went on, Trump even mounted a campaign to pressure Obama into releasing his birth certificate, threatening to send investigators to Hawaii to "find out the truth." All the while, Trump floated the idea that Obama's birth documents might label him as Muslim.

At a campaign rally, Trump nodded along as a supporter claimed, "We have a problem in this country; it's called Muslims." Trump bobbed his head, saying, "Right, you know the current president is one. He's not even American!" The supporter then proceeded to ask Trump, "When can we get rid of them [Muslims]?" Trump responded, "We're going to be looking at a lot of different things."

The next day during the daily White House press briefing, former spokesman Josh Earnest responded, "It is too bad that he [Trump] wasn't able to summon the same kind of patriotism that we saw from Senator McCain, who responded much more effectively and directly when a supporter at one of his campaign events seven years ago raised the same kind of false claims."

Spokesman Earnest was referring to a town hall during the 2008 election cycle. Then republican presidential nominee, Senator John McCain, took the microphone away from a woman who called Obama "an Arab." McCain adamantly corrected her: "No

ma'am. He's a decent family man citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues." Since the late Senator McCain's death in August 2018, this exchange has become famous. Renowned media outlets and prominent voices from across the political spectrum have revered this exchange as a shining example of McCain's courage and dignity.

This praise is misplaced. Rather than a noble defense of President Obama, Senator McCain's statement is a glaring example of the ingrained nature of American anti-Arab racism. McCain's gut reaction was to assert Obama's decency, proof the president could not possibly be "an Arab." This response perpetuates the racist myth that there is something inherently negative about Arabness. While it is possible the senator intended to be supportive of tolerance, his comment perpetuates the very sentiment it may have wished to destroy by inherently validating anti-Arab bias.

What is most unsettling about this story, however, is the non-reaction of the American viewership. The ingrained racial bias of Senator McCain's response was lost on the average American as well as countless news analysts. When the national narrative of hate toward Arabs/Muslims is deeply entrenched in American society, fear is validated and bigotry is normalized.

The American Islamophobic discourse is so deeply rooted in U.S. history, culture, and society that its origins and manifestations are often misunderstood. Recently, scholars have begun to analyze Islamophobia through the lens of racism. Increasingly, Islamophobia is understood as a racial project, anchored in Orientalism and protracted by

American “War on Terror” policies. In my opinion, there is a need for further examination of the connection between racialized anti-Arab and anti-Muslim tropes and American Islamophobic narratives. As such, this paper proposes a critical dialogue about how to understand one contested concept (Islamophobia) by using another contested one (racialization). This paper seeks to understand if--and if so, to what extent--racialization is central to understanding America’s pernicious brand of Islamophobia.

To explore this question, the paper begins by introducing the concept of racialization and explaining the significance of race in American society. Next, it examines the historical formation of Arab American “whiteness” from the late nineteenth century into the first half of the twentieth century. Next, the paper considers the latter half of the twentieth century, when Muslims in America became more visible and when Arabs/Muslims were increasingly represented and understood as a monolithic group with negative traits, including an inherent proclivity to violence. The paper analyzes Arab Americans’ “rise” and “fall” from marginal whiteness through the framework of racialization. Next, the paper discusses the extension of Arab racialization to Muslims, which results in the creation of a conflated racialized archetype: “the Middle Easterner.”

The racialization paradigm captures social practices and processes that occur over time. Arab/Muslims in America have experienced a collective shift in their social status in American society, which can only be captured by examining the group’s history over time. Thus, racialization offers an appropriate framework through which to examine the Arab American experience.

In addition to a review of scholarship connecting racialization and Islamophobia, this paper draws from the results of a survey about Texans' views of Islam and Muslims. Racialization is not static; it is produced, reproduced, and solidified. As such, the survey results evidence rhetoric and narratives that reiterate and regurgitate racialized conceptions of Islam. From the survey results, this paper aims to demonstrate that the archetype of the "Middle Easterner," which has been constructed through the racialization process of Arab Muslims, has shaped how Americans have come to view Islam and has determined some of the specific features of American Islamophobia

Over the past three years, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab rhetoric and discrimination has surged. Prejudice against Arabs and Muslims has moved from the fringes of American society to the mainstream. Most visibly, President Trump signed an executive order barring people from several Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S. He assigned key Cabinet-level positions to people who have embraced anti-Muslim and anti-Arab views, and he even disseminated anti-Muslim videos to his tens of millions of Twitter followers. Politicians, media correspondents, and everyday citizens are more frequently encountering – and adopting – Islamophobic rhetoric. As this rhetoric becomes more prevalent, Islamophobia is at risk of becoming even more normalized. This paper is an attempt to better understand the nature of American Islamophobia in the hopes of rendering it more visible.



## CHAPTER ONE

### What is Racialization?

*U.S. society is so thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity.*  
(Omi and Winant, 1994)

American society has been fixated on race and racial hierarchies since its foundation. Race relations have largely been defined along black and white lines throughout much of America's history. The racial composition of the modern United States, however, has moved away from a black-white binary and toward a more pluralistic society. Immigration and increased visibility of immigrants have altered the national understanding of race. When immigrant groups come to the United States, they enter a racially-organized society. As such, immigrant groups undergo "racialization," a process in which racial categories are formed, occupied, transformed, and dismantled.

### *Race and Racism*

Before delving into racialization and its effect on Arab Americans, it is important to supply working definitions of race and racism. Historically, race has been used as a classification system to sort humans into distinct categories. Antiquated concepts of race

designate people groups according to phenotypic traits believed to be hereditary, distinctive, and fixed.<sup>1</sup> White Europeans rationalized hierarchical systems of relations with non-white peoples, such as colonization and slavery, using overtly bio-racial terms.

Nineteenth century race theorists, such as Charles Pickering and Georges Cuvier, fixated on the human body and used concepts such as anthropometrics and geographic distribution to enumerate biological differences between humans.<sup>2</sup> This biological determinism situated existing European prejudices in human biology, which helped to maintain a societal hierarchy with whites at the top. The concept of “race” in the dominant historical frame has had at least these three main elements: 1. an accent on physically and biologically distinctive categories, 2. an emphasis on “race” as the primary determinant of a group’s essential traits, and 3. a hierarchy of superior and inferior racial groups.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary literature, however, has pointed to scientific evidence that racial subspecies denoted by phenotype and other genetic or biological characteristics do not exist.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the Critical Race Theory, which was first introduced as a theoretical movement within American law schools in the mid-1980s, proposes an idea known as the “social construction” thesis. The thesis holds that race is a product of social thought and

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<sup>1</sup> Vilna Bashir Treitler, “Racialization and its paradigms: From Ireland to North America,” *Current Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (2015): 214.

<sup>2</sup> Falguni Sheth, “The Racialization of Muslims in the Post-9/11 United States,” *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2012): 12.

<sup>3</sup> Joe R. Feagin, “Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations,” *Taylor & Francis Group* (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Treitler, “Racialization and its paradigms: From Ireland to North America,” 214.

relations. Rather than being objective or fixed, the thesis states that race does not correspond with any biological or genetic reality. Instead, races are categories that society invents and manipulates according to circumstances and convenience. Of course, people with common ancestral origins share certain physical traits, such as skin color and hair texture. These traits, however, constitute an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment and have little or nothing to do with higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and morality. The social construction theory asserts that society often ignores these scientific proofs and, instead, creates races, endowing them with pseudo-permanent characteristics.<sup>5</sup> Today, there is very little formal disagreement among social scientists in accepting the idea that race is a socially constructed category.

With this background, the first working definition to be clarified is *race*. It is important to note that race is a dynamic concept, specific to historical, cultural, geographic, and political contexts. The following definition does not attempt to capture the concept of race in a one-size-fits-all fashion. For the purposes of this paper, *race* will refer to the social classification and differentiation between people based upon essentialized characteristics derived from culture and physical appearance. Race, though constructed and subject to change, is a social reality. In this paper, race is understood as a hierarchical structure responsible for historical and contemporary socioeconomic inequalities, political injustice, and societal marginalization.

Nowadays, few people in the United States claim to be “racist.” Many argue that racism is merely an ideological phenomenon that is largely subdued in present-day

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<sup>5</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, (New York: The New Press, 1996): 10.

American society. The belief that racism no longer shapes American society is a sincere fiction. Racial considerations shade numerous policies, behaviors, and attitudes in the United States. One reason why, in general terms, whites and people of color cannot agree on racial matters is because they define the term “racism” in dramatically different ways.<sup>6</sup> For most whites, racism is conceived as prejudice or bigotry. For most people of color, racism is seen as a systemic and institutionalized phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Of course, contemporary racist practices in the U.S. are more sophisticated and subtle than those typical of the Jim Crow era in the southern United States. Yet, this paper will argue that contemporary practices are also effective in shaping and maintaining the racial status quo.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper, *racism* is understood as a racial structure, that is, a network of relations at the social, political, economic, and ideological levels that shapes the life chances of the various races. Racial structure organizes the nature and character of race relations in a society. From this vantage point, rather than arguing about whether racism has declined or increased, it is arguably more useful to assess if a transformation has occurred in the racial structure of the United States. The elements that comprise the racial structure (i.e. racism) are:<sup>9</sup>

1. Unbalanced power dynamics between groups
2. Increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and practices

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<sup>6</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003): 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Garner, *Racisms: An Introduction*, (London: Sage, 2010).

3. Avoidance of racial terminology and the ever-growing claim by whites that they experience “reverse racism”
4. Elaboration of a racial agenda over political matters so as to eschew direct racial references
5. Invisibility of most mechanisms that perpetuate racial inequality
6. Forms of discrimination ranging on the spectrum from denial of access to material resources at one end to genocide at the other

Regardless of the precise scholarly definitions of race and racism at a given time in history, the two concepts profoundly shape society. David Theo Goldberg captures this reality: “[Race] has established who can be imported and who exported, who are immigrants and who are indigenous, who may be property and who are citizens; and among the latter who get to vote and who do not, who are protected by the law and who are its objects, who are employable and who are not, who have access and privilege and who are marginalized.”<sup>10</sup>

### *Race in the United States*

American society has largely functioned based upon a racial paradigm in which there are two primary categories: black and white. In this black-white social structure,

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<sup>10</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

whites are dominant and blacks are subjugated.<sup>11</sup> This binary paradigm has shaped, illuminated, and confined racial thought in the United States for generations.<sup>12</sup>

Racial organization in the United States is characterized by white supremacy, meaning a racial structure made up of social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege.<sup>13</sup> White supremacy took root in the European colonizers' conquest of North American indigenous peoples and entrenched itself in African slaveholding in North America.<sup>14</sup> Today, whiteness demarcates privilege and power to such an extent that all aspects of American society systematically privilege those designated as "white" over those who have been perceived as "non-white."<sup>15</sup> White dominance in the United States has led to the foundation of what social theorist Joe Feagin calls "the white racial frame,"<sup>16</sup> meaning whiteness has long been the central reference point of American society.

The cultural, ethnic, and national diversity in the United States today proves this black-white binary to be problematic. Many Americans subscribe to the black-white paradigm because it allows them to simplify and make sense of a very complicated racial

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<sup>11</sup> Sheth, "The Racialization of Muslims in the Post-9/11 United States," 16.

<sup>12</sup> Robert S. Chang, *Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-structuralism, and Narrative Space* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Kristine J. Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal, "Assimilating to a White Identity," *IMR* Vol. 41, No. 4 (2007): 860.

<sup>14</sup> Treitler, "Racialization and its paradigms: From Ireland to North America," 218.

<sup>15</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists : Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-framing* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2013), 90.

reality.<sup>17</sup> To focus solely on this paradigm, however, is to misunderstand the complicated racial landscape in the United States.<sup>18</sup> In the following sections, this chapter will discuss how changing demographics challenge and complicate this conversation. For now, it is important to understand that the U.S. is structurally organized as a racial hierarchy in which whites occupy a superior position to blacks, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other non-white minority groups in social, political, and economic activities.<sup>19</sup>

### *What is “racialization”?*

The racial order--the set of beliefs, assumptions, rules, and practices that have shaped how people are grouped and connected in a society--may initially seem fixed. On the contrary, race is never finished, never stable, never precisely defined or definable.<sup>20</sup> Rather, the racial order continuously changes through a process called “racialization.”

The concept of racialization was first associated with the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant in the 1980s, who employed the term to signify “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or

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<sup>17</sup> Angelina E. Castagno, “Extending the Bounds of Race and Racism: Indigenous Women and the Persistence of the Black-White Paradigm of Race,” *The Urban Review*, Vol. 37, No. 5, (2005): 454.

<sup>18</sup> Chang, *Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-structuralism, and Narrative Space*, 1267.

<sup>19</sup> Marisa Abrajano and Zoltan L. Hajnal, *White Backlash Book Subtitle: Immigration, Race, and American Politics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015): 12.

<sup>20</sup> Sheth, “The Racialization of Muslims in the Post-9/11 United States,” 11.

group.”<sup>21</sup> They held that racialization is an ideological, historically specific process. For example, racialization can be employed to understand the Jewish and Irish identities. Now widely classified as white, these groups historically carried distinct racial signifiers and were not afforded the privileges associated with whiteness. As historical context has developed and changed, so have their racial identities.

Recent scholarship holds that racialization is the process of racial formation in which racial groups develop, evolve, and are maintained in society at the individual and institutional level.<sup>22</sup> It is the process of ascribing certain traits as inherent characteristics of a group. This process is not limited to physical and cultural traits but includes a variety of attributes, such as ideas about where the group is from, how they speak, where they work, what they believe, how they dress, how they organize themselves socially, etc. As an outcome of the racialization process, designated characteristics emerge as “racial.” Functionally, racialization draws a line around all the members of a group and instigates “group-ness.” Groups face uneven societal consequences based upon how their group has been racialized. Understanding racialization provides us with the language needed to discuss newer forms of racism that are not necessarily based on phenotype, as well as older forms.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s (Critical Social Thought)*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Sheth, "The Racialization of Muslims in the Post-9/11 United States," 28.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 12-14.



The term racialization was initially used to describe the process of Europeans ascribing characteristics to the people whom they encountered in the act of colonization.<sup>24</sup> Thus, groups that are racialized (i.e. made into either de jure or de facto races) are assigned to a hierarchy with white Europeans at its summit. Today, the concept of racialization explains how the U.S. is organized as a racial hierarchy where whites (or groups perceived to be white) occupy the top positions in society while groups perceived as black and increasingly, Hispanic, are found in the lowest positions.<sup>25</sup>

Most all scholars agree that racialization is something the powerful do to the less powerful,<sup>26</sup> which corresponds to the working definition of racism outlined in the previous section. In step with the definition of race outlined in the previous section, racialization theory shows that race is a socially constructed category. It is important to clarify, however, that racialization is a social reality. It is not simply a theory whose propagation makes it real, as some sceptics might propose. Patrick Wolfe, an Australian anthropologist and ethnographer whose work on racialization has informed the study of colonization, asserts that “racialization is an exercise of power in its own right, as opposed to a commentary that enables or facilitates a prior exercise of power.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978).

<sup>25</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s (Critical Social Thought)*.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Martinez HoSang and Oneka LaBennett, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), s.v. "Racialization."

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "Race and racialisation: Some thoughts," *Postcolonial Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (2002): 55.

Racialization is a theoretical tool scholars can use to understand the creation, maintenance, and changing nature of racial meanings and experiences. Racialization provides the language needed to discuss racism against Arab and Muslim Americans, which this paper will later discuss.

### *Racialization of Immigrant Groups in the United States*

Racialization is a conceptual bridge between scholarship on race and on immigration. It is important to understand that when immigrants come to the United States, they are entering a society that is fixated on race and constructed, in large part, along racial lines. Immigrants are, invariably, placed into a racial hierarchy.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of the distinct identities associated with immigrant groups' countries of origin, racial identification becomes one of their primary principles of social organization in the United States.<sup>29</sup> Racialization--further, understanding the social construction of race--allows us to explain the experiences of immigrants in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

Today, immigration rates to the United States match early twentieth century levels. In 2016 there were 43.7 million immigrants in the country, meaning one in every seven people living in the U.S. was born in another country and was not a U.S. citizen at

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<sup>28</sup> Kristine J. Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal, "Assimilating to a White Identity," 860.

<sup>29</sup> Rogelio Sáenz and Karen Manges Douglas, "A Call for the Racialization of Immigration Studies," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2015): 167.

<sup>30</sup> Sheth, "The Racialization of Muslims in the Post-9/11 United States," 32.

birth. Over the past half century, non-Europeans have made up the majority of the migrants. Massive waves of non-White immigration have altered the United States' racial and ethnic composition. In 1965 84% of Americans were white, and less than 5% of the population was foreign-born. Today, the white population has dropped below 60% while the percent of foreign-born Americans has risen to 14%.<sup>31</sup> Immigrants and their U.S.-born children now number approximately 86.4 million people, or 27% of the overall U.S. population.<sup>32</sup> Immigration and its impacts on the nation's economic, social, cultural, and political spheres has become increasingly more visible.<sup>33</sup> In an era in which many Americans claim that the significance of race (i.e. the black-white paradigm) has faded, immigrant populations have become a more central part of U.S. race relations.<sup>34</sup>

When minority newcomers demonstrate perceivable phenotypic and cultural differences from the dominant mainstream (i.e. white Americans), they quickly become the "other" in society. Their attributes, specifically the attributes that differ from the white mainstream, are essentialized and ascribed to the group as a whole. The groups are

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<sup>31</sup> D'Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, "10 Demographic Trends That Are Shaping the U.S. and the World," Pew Research Center, March 31, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>.

<sup>32</sup> "U.S. Immigrant Population and Share over Time, 1850-Present." Migration Policy Institute, August 09, 2018, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true>.

<sup>33</sup> Abrajano and Hajnal, *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Sulieman, "Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab American Experience," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999).

compared to pre-existing racial groups.<sup>35</sup> Many of the newcomers to the United States do not conform to either side of the American black-white racial binary. Generally speaking, racialization of most minority immigrant groups entails their subordination as the “other,” and therefore, inferior to white Americans.

The racial category that newly arriving immigrants are incorporated into affects if and how resources and opportunities are afforded to them. It determines how they are integrated into society and shapes their experiences in the United States as well as the experience and opportunities of later generations of their children.<sup>36</sup> Later in this paper, we will discuss how the Arab Americans have been racialization and what factors have affected their racial identity over several generations. Today, high rates of immigration are met with increasingly anti-immigrant sentiments, as immigrants are often greeted with suspicion and distrust.<sup>37</sup> Nativist hostility, political infringement, and cultural marginalization all have racial elements that heavily influence the integration of immigrant groups in the United States.

In America, immigration is inextricably tied to racialization. Neglecting to discuss race in conversations about immigration is a mistake because it legitimates the notion that race is tangential to U.S. society—just one of other variables that provide some causal explanation. Ignoring race when considering the experiences of immigrants perpetuates the false belief that racial injustices are in the past, having been addressed by civil rights

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<sup>35</sup> Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, "Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects," *Choice Reviews Online*, Vol. 45, No. 12 (2008): 119.

<sup>36</sup> Sáenz and Douglas, "A Call for the Racialization of Immigration Studies," 167.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

legislation. Regrettably, racial injustices are not aberrations from the norm of equality and justice. Instead, race has been foundational to the social institutions of the United States and must be considered as a major factor in the lives of immigrants.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Brief History of Arab American Immigration and Racial Integration

*No one was 'white' before he came to America. It took generations and a vast amount of coercion.*

(Ta-Nehisi Coates)

Since America's founding, race has been a key category for organizing difference in the United States. Race is an interpretive construct with consequential power in American society, and it is one that newcomers quickly learn. Unique from other minority groups, Arabs find a disjuncture between their official category (white) and their experiences. Rather than neatly fixed in an understood racial category, Arabs have occupied a perplexing spot in American racial history best described as "in between" white and non-white. The narrative of Arab Americans is one of past assimilation and current racialization.

Thanks in large part to their Christian backgrounds, early Arab immigrants overcame prejudice by assimilating into the American mainstream. Arab Americans were once perceived as marginally white, and, as such, benefited from a range of rights that were denied to groups ascribed as non-white. Arabs later experienced a reversal of this status and underwent racial formation. Moreover, the sprawling story of Muslim Arabs in America complicates this narrative and provides an added layer to understanding Arab migration and integration into the American racial structure.

### *Early Arab Migration*

Arabs first began arriving in the United States in sizable numbers between 1880 and the 1920s, during the period of massive European migration, when more than twenty million immigrants entered the U.S. Approximately 95,000 of those immigrants were from Greater Syria (present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel).<sup>1</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman empire was the dominant power in the Middle East, having colonized several Arab countries. Political repression, economic instability, and war subsequently led many Arabs to travel to the United States.<sup>2</sup> Christian Arabs fled religious persecution under Ottoman rule, but the majority of Arab immigrants were simply drawn to the United States by economic opportunity and the hope for a better life.

The majority of Arab immigrants had little formal education, were from peasant origins, and were Christian by religion.<sup>3</sup> The published literature on Arab American communities of this period shows that they held structural positions and faced barriers of prejudice and discrimination resemblant to those of white ethnics. As stated by American historian Gary Gerstle, Arabs faced obstacles “similar to that which Jews, Italians, and other eastern and southern Europeans experienced in the 1920s: a stigmatization milder than what the Germans experienced during World War I, but strong enough [ . . . ] to

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Samhan, “Who are Arab Americans?” *Grolier's Multimedia Encyclopedia*, (2001).

<sup>2</sup> Amy Aisen Kallander, review of *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian Diaspora*, by Sarah Gualtieri, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Fall 2011): 117-119.

<sup>3</sup> Louise Cainkar, "Immigration to the United States," in *Arab American Encyclopedia*, by Loretta Hall (2000).

render them uncertain about their place in American society.”<sup>4</sup> Although Arabs were barred from a broad range of institutions run by mainstream whites, they settled in urban and rural areas, ran businesses, worked in factories, built businesses, flourished artistically, held government offices, achieved a degree of economic success, and led social lives that were intertwined with members of white ethnic groups, which frequently resulted in intermarriage. Of course, there are meaningful exceptions to this simplification of history.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the general profile of the Arab experience in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century displayed more social, political, and economic incorporation than that of racially excluded African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, and Latinos.

By the 1920’s, there were an estimated 250,000 Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians in the United States. Nearly all immigrants arriving from the Middle East came with passports and identification papers issued by the Ottoman Empire. As a result, early Arab immigration figures are imprecise, as Armenians, Turks, and Arabs were all identified at the Port of Entry as subjects of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>6</sup> Initially, Arabs were labelled by the U.S. government as “Turks in Asia,” “Asiatic,” and “Syrian.”<sup>7</sup> Only after

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<sup>4</sup> Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton University Press, 2000): 34

<sup>5</sup> Louise Cainkar, "The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience." *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2006): 225-56.

<sup>6</sup> "History," Arab American Stories, Accessed March 1, 2019.  
<http://www.arabamericanstories.org/arab-americans/history/>.

<sup>7</sup> Rosina Hassoun, "Islam-o-phobia: Racialization and Stereotyping of Arabs and Muslim Americans." Lecture, Arab American Institute Foundation (2003).



the fall of the Ottoman Empire did most Arab immigrants begin to identify with the particular region within the empire from which they came, such as Syria or Lebanon.

Before the American Civil War, the U.S. government's system of racial classification primarily focused on the black-white divide. After emancipation and several substantial waves of immigration, the U.S. government was compelled to begin considering where dozens of ethnicities and nationalities fell on the prescribed racial spectrum. American society became obsessed with attempting to classify every immigrant group, no matter how small, by its racial composition. The federal government began using the U.S. census as a tool, adding questions about ethnicity and language. The 1880 census, for example, asked, for the first time, about the place of birth of the respondent's family. Then, the 1890 census added a question about the respondent's mother tongue.<sup>8</sup> An immigrant's "racial" category at this time usually corresponded with his or her nation of origin.

By the early 1900s, the right to American citizenship was deeply tied to the concepts of race and religion.<sup>9</sup> Immigration and naturalization policy employed whiteness as a precondition for citizenship.<sup>10</sup> The Asian Exclusion Act of 1882, for example, was rooted in race ideology and restricted immigration for those coming from Asia. Because of the widespread anti-Asian sentiment, Arabs were trying not to be associated as

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<sup>8</sup> Jason Gauthier, "History," Census Bureau QuickFacts, Accessed February 5, 2019. [https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/index\\_of\\_questions/1880\\_1.html](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1880_1.html).

<sup>9</sup> Rosina Hassoun, "Islam-o-phobia: Racialization and Stereotyping of Arabs and Muslim Americans."

<sup>10</sup> Amaney Jamal and Kristine Ajrouch, "Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans," *International Immigration Review*, Vol. 41, No. 4, (December 2007): 865.

“yellow” or “Asiatic”, and instead, to be seen before the law as “white.”<sup>11</sup> The majority of Arabs in America after the earliest period of Arab immigration were Christians with fair skin. Consequently, neither their phenotype nor their religious garb outed them as blatantly “other.”<sup>12</sup> Rather, Arab citizenship status was unclear. They fell somewhere between “white” and “other,” Between citizen and not.

### *Court Cases*

When Arabs began to request American citizenship in the late nineteenth century, they were refused naturalization on the grounds that they did not meet the racial requirement of U.S. law. The Naturalization Act of 1790 defined eligibility for citizenship as confined to “any alien being free white persons, and to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent.”<sup>13</sup> Within the first decade of the twentieth century, the American courts began to question whether the Arabs’ birthplace and racial appearance qualified them as white or as Asian, and therefore ineligible for citizenship.<sup>14</sup> Many of these court cases addressed the naturalization status of Syrians, specifically.

In U.S. Court of Appeals case *Dow v. United States* (1915), George Dow, a Syrian immigrant, appealed two lower court decisions denying his application for

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<sup>11</sup> Rosina Hassoun, “Islam-o-phobia: Racialization and Stereotyping of Arabs and Muslim Americans.”

<sup>12</sup> Louise Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience after 9/11* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011): 340.

<sup>13</sup> Luella Gettys, *The Law of Citizenship in the United States* (Chicago, 1934): 30.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Gaultieri, “Becoming ‘White’: Race, Religion, and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2009): 35.

naturalization.<sup>15</sup> Dow argued that some residents of Western Asia were, in fact, white, not Asian. The defendant leveraged the prejudice of the judges against them by asking whether Jesus was black or white. Knowing no prejudiced judge would answer “black”, the defendant was then able to say he, like Jesus, also was from the Holy Land. Dow continued by insisting on Syrians’ contributions to white, Christian civilization. Although the “color” of Arabs brought about challenges to their citizenship rights, a competing discourse of “shared civilizations” affirmed their qualification for the rights associated with whiteness. Accordingly, the circuit court affirmed Dow’s right to naturalize based on “the generally received opinion [...] that the inhabitants of a portion of Asia, including Syria, [are] to be classed as white persons.”<sup>16</sup> Arabs were to be officially classified by the U.S. government as Caucasian/White.<sup>17</sup>

This court decision and others like it cleared a path for Arab immigrants, especially those from Greater Syria and those who adhered to Christianity, to follow the white ethnic experience.<sup>18</sup> In 1943, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service described Arabs as persons who “shared in the development of our civilization,”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: the Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985): 257.

<sup>16</sup> *Dow v. United States*, (Circuit Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit September 14, 1915) (Nexis Lexis): 7.

<sup>17</sup> Jamal and Ajrouch “Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans,” 861.

<sup>18</sup> Bradley J. Zopf, “A Different Kind of Brown: Arabs and Middle Easterners as Anti-American Muslims.” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 2018): 181.

<sup>19</sup> *Ex Parte Mohriez*, (U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts April 13, 1944) (Justia US Law). <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/54/941/1739378/>.

affirming their whiteness and eligibility for all immigration benefits, including naturalization. Consequently, Arab Americans spent this early period as a comparatively advantaged group and were afforded many of the protections and benefits of whiteness, such as eligibility for homestead lands, unionized jobs, better housing, full legal and voting rights, upward mobility, and access to public office.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Racial Classification of Arabs: White*

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget holds the authority to create the categories for “race and ethnicity” on the U.S. Census.<sup>21</sup> The racial classification system used today was developed by a governmental ad-hoc working group between 1975 and 1978. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the racial categories represent a social-political construct for the race or races that respondents consider themselves to be, and the categories “generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country.”<sup>22</sup> The Office of Management and Budget describes race as “not scientific or anthropological.” The office’s definition of race takes into account “social and cultural

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<sup>20</sup> Louise Cainkar, “The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience,” 73.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “About Race,” Census Bureau QuickFacts, (January 23, 2018). <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Questions and Answers for Census 2000 Data on Race,” (March 14, 2001). <https://web.archive.org/web/20010405061504/http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2001/raceqandas.html>.

characteristics as well as ancestry," using "appropriate scientific methodologies" that are not "primarily biological or genetic in reference."<sup>23</sup>

Today, the U.S. Census considers five racial categories: 1. American Indian or Native Alaskan, 2. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 3. Asian, 4. Black or African American, and 5. White.<sup>24</sup> According to these five categories, Arabs and other persons with origins in the Middle East and North Africa fall under the same category that identifies the European majority: white.<sup>25</sup> Arabs in America today are divided on how to view and understand their white classification. Some Arab Americans find it helpful to identify with the mainstream, as whiteness represents a sociological category that demarcates unspoken privilege and power.<sup>26</sup> For a variety of reasons, some Arabs may understand themselves as white (especially if they have benefited or seek to benefit from historical whiteness) while others may not. Arab American communities vary in their political alliances and understandings around race.<sup>27</sup>

Although the U.S. census currently classifies Arabs as white along with the European majority, many are not afforded the mainstream privileges linked to such an identification.<sup>28</sup> In fact, a 2016 opinion poll of Arab American voters conducted by the

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<sup>23</sup> American Anthropological Association, "A Brief History of the OMB Directive 15," (1997). <https://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/CommitteeDetail.aspx?ItemNumber=2223>.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "About Race."

<sup>25</sup> "Not Quite White," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (Arab American Institute, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Jamal and Ajrouch, "Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans," 860.

<sup>27</sup> Cainkar, "The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience," 70.

<sup>28</sup> Wayne Baker and Ronald Stockton, *Detroit Arab American Study (DAAS)*, University of Michigan, October 25, 2006: 319.

Arab American Institute found that a 62% of Arabs believe they are not treated as whites, but more like other minorities, such as Asians Americans and Hispanic Americans.<sup>29</sup> A 2018 survey conducted by the City of New York Commission on Human Rights found that 71% of Arabs reported experiencing “a significant amount of discrimination” leading up to and following the 2016 presidential election.<sup>30</sup> For example, the survey found that 19% of “Arab/Muslim looking” people are regularly shoved on the subway platform and are 49.7% more likely to experience verbal harassment than non-Arabs.<sup>31</sup> Because of their white classification, however, Arab Americans are not a federally recognized minority and have no minority protected status. The categories of disadvantaged racial and ethnic minority groups were officially created in 1977 by the Office of Management and Budget Directive 15. Arab Americans were not included among them.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, Arab Americans were largely excluded from organized discussions of racism and discrimination, from multicultural education, and from textbook treatments of American racial and ethnic groups.

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<sup>29</sup> “The Arab American Vote 2016: Identity and Political Concerns,” *Arab American Institute*, (October 25, 2016). [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aai/pages/11954/attachments/original/1477405602/2016\\_Attitudes\\_Polling.pdf?1477405602](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aai/pages/11954/attachments/original/1477405602/2016_Attitudes_Polling.pdf?1477405602)

<sup>30</sup> “Xenophobia, Islamophobia, and Anti-Semitism in NYC Leading Up to and Following the 2016 Presidential Election,” NYC Human Rights, Accessed February 15, 2019. [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cchr/downloads/pdf/publications/MASAJIS\\_Report.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cchr/downloads/pdf/publications/MASAJIS_Report.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Office of Management and Budget, “Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting,” *Federal Register* (August 1977). [https://transition.fcc.gov/Bureaus/OSEC/library/legislative\\_histories/1195.pdf](https://transition.fcc.gov/Bureaus/OSEC/library/legislative_histories/1195.pdf).

Denied minority status, some Arab Americans have come to identify as white. Even so, they are denied the cultural citizenship of whiteness.<sup>33</sup> Personally experiencing the privileges of whiteness has been linked to Arabs' willingness to self-identifying as white. In interviews conducted in metropolitan Chicago, Arabs were asked about how they viewed their place in the American racial structure. Participants were asked, "Do you think Arabs are white, not white, or what?" 63% of respondents said "not white" while 20% said "white,"<sup>34</sup> Of those who responded "not white," 36% explained this answer stemmed from "how Arabs are treated in American society." They saw their racial status as non-white because they do not benefit from the perquisites, assumptions, and rewards that accrue to whiteness. Instead, the respondents spoke of political exclusion and discriminatory treatment in their places of employment, schools, and other public spaces. A majority of people who indicated Arabs are white, however, immediately offered an unprovoked explanation about official forms. These respondents explained how they usually would fill out census forms and job and school applications. In other words, the discussion of race became a discussion of categories and boxes. Drawing from this experience, Arabs know that they are supposed to check the "white" box on forms, even if they personally believe that Arabs are not white. The rigid

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<sup>33</sup> Sawsan Abdulrahim, "Whiteness and the Arab Immigrant Experience" in *Race and Arab Americans Post 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*, by Amaney Jamal (Syracuse University Press, 2008): 131.

<sup>34</sup> Joan Ferrante and Prince Brown, Jr., *The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Pearson, 2000): 95.

American racial classification system has socialized many Arab Americans to check “white,” whether they accept that designation or not.<sup>35</sup>

### *Islam and “Whiteness”*

The history of Muslim Arab immigration and integration into the United States racial structure differs from that of Christian Arab immigrants. Since the late 1800s, the U.S. government has had a antagonistic relationship with Muslims. A court case in 1891, for instance, officially described Muslims as a rival ideology and an "enemy race." In this particular case, the U.S. Supreme Court highlighted “the intense hostility of the people of Moslem faith to all other sects, and particularly to Christians.”<sup>36</sup> Muslim immigrants were denied entry at U.S. ports in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Christian immigrants accused of secretly being Muslims were also excluded. In 1942, Ahmed Hassan became the first Muslim Arab to petition for U.S. citizenship. Hassan was denied naturalization because the court said: “It cannot be expected that as a class they [Muslims, more specifically Muslim Arabs] would readily intermarry with our population and be assimilated into our civilization.”<sup>37</sup> Measures barring Muslim immigration to the U.S. lasted until 1944. In *Ex Parte Mohriez* (1944), the court granted

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<sup>35</sup> Cankar, “*The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience*,” 67.

<sup>36</sup> *In re Ross*, (U.S. Supreme Court April 30, 1891), (Justia US Supreme Court).  
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/140/453/>.

<sup>37</sup> *In re Ahmed Hassan*, (U.S. District Court, E. D. Michigan, S. D. December 15, 1942) (Leagle).  
<https://www.leagle.com/decision/194289148fsupp8431673#>.



naturalization to an Arab-born Muslim for the first time. The man was from Saudi Arabia, and the court based the ruling on the idea that Arabs should be considered part of “the white race.”

The histories of early Christian Arab immigration and Muslim Arab immigration differ significantly. All Arabs--regardless of religion--have been officially assigned to the white racial classification. Arab American racial self-identification, however, is not a static or uniform phenomenon. Arab Americans have racial identification options—a modification of Waters’s (1990) concept of “ethnic options”<sup>38</sup>—that members of other groups historically racialized as non-white do not possess. As detailed above, some Arabs are viewed and treated as though they fall within the white mainstream and enjoy the privileges associated with whiteness, while others do not. This phenomenon begs a more thorough examination of the specific characteristics that result in differential experiences with race and racism.<sup>39</sup>

Religion has played a major role in determining how Arab Americans racially self-identify. Studies have found that religion and its associated traits have influenced Arabs’ assimilation patterns and racial self-identification. Generally speaking, Muslim Arab in the United States self-identify as “white” less than their Christian counterparts do.

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> Saher Selod and David G. Embrick, “Racialization and Muslims: Situating the Muslim Experience in Race Scholarship,” *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 7, No. 8, August 2013.

Instead, Muslim Arabs are more likely to self-identify as “other” than non-Muslim Arabs.<sup>40</sup> The Detroit Arab American Study in 2006, for example, found that 31% of all Arab Americans identified as “other.” When looking at Muslim Arabs, specifically, that number rises to 50%.<sup>41</sup> Among other things, the study found chronic tensions of exclusion and inclusion, that Arab Americans are viewed as essentially foreign, and that Muslim Arabs feel more alienated from the mainstream than Arab Christians.<sup>42</sup> The results of a similar study conducted in Chicago showed a similar trend: a majority of Muslim Arabs viewed their social position in American society as subordinate and translated that status into a non-white racial position when self-identifying in a race-based societal hierarchy.<sup>43</sup>

Religious affiliation clearly impacts how the Arab immigrant views him/herself in relation to the country. The tendency for Muslim Arabs in America to self-identify as “other” identity may have a couple of implications. First, resisting the “white” classification could serve as a way for Muslim Arabs to assert their cultural distinctiveness. Second, it may signify a response to mainstream discrimination targeting

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<sup>40</sup> Saher Selod, “Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim American Men and Women Post-9/11,” *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (January 2015): 79.

<sup>41</sup> Wayne Baker, Sally Howell, Amaney Jamal, et al., “Preliminary Findings from the Detroit Arab American Study,” *University of Michigan*, [http://webuser.bus.umich.edu/wayneb/pdfs/culture/DAAS\\_FINAL\\_REPORT.pdf](http://webuser.bus.umich.edu/wayneb/pdfs/culture/DAAS_FINAL_REPORT.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Wayne Baker and Ronald Stockton, *Detroit Arab American Study*, 319.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas De Genova, “The ‘War on Terror’ as Racial Crisis: Homeland Security, Obama, and Racial (Trans)formations,” in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Daniel Martinez HoSang, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

Muslims.<sup>44</sup> Either way, the remainder of this paper will explore why and how Arabs--specifically Muslim Arabs--have experienced discrimination.

Regardless of what box Arabs are supposed to check on the United States census, “white” or another, many Arabs experience otherness. Since the categories of minorities have been set, Arabs have experienced the double burden of being excluded from the full scope of whiteness and from mainstream recognition as people of color. Rather, Arabs have sat in an ambiguous position at the margins of whiteness.<sup>45</sup> They stand outside racial demarcations in a precarious position of otherness compounded by policies and perceptions.

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<sup>44</sup> Jamal and Ajrouch, “Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans,” 862.

<sup>45</sup> Cainkar, “The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience,” 76.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Racial Re-formation of Arabs in the United States

*For the great enemy of truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, continued, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.*

(John F. Kennedy)

Arabs have had a unique experience with social construction in United States. Early immigrants overcame prejudice by assimilating into the American mainstream. Several events over the past few decades have brought that process of assimilation to a halt. Instead, Arabs have been marginalized through racial formation. It is a commonly held belief that the widespread anti-Arab sentiment in the United States began as a reaction to the attacks on September 11th, 2001, and escalated from there. America's ubiquitous fear of Arabs, however, dates back over half a century. It was midcourse in twentieth century that the social status of Arab Americans changed from one characterized by socioeconomic and political inclusion to that of a pariah. Arabs have come to embody the "other" against which American identity is built. When the September 11 attacks occurred, history had readily positioned them to be cast as collectively culpable.

## *Racial Formation*

Despite popular American media narratives, the fall of Arabs from the grace of marginal whiteness to a subordinate racial status began long before the attacks on the September 11 attacks.<sup>1</sup> While these attacks certainly galvanized racial stereotypes, bringing them to the forefront of American consciousness, Arabs had long been familiar with being treated with suspicion and with being viewed as a group that shares violent and hateful traits. The hyper-scrutiny of their communities, which intensified dramatically after 9/11, was informed by a long history and broader culture of anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, and anti-Middle East sentiments.<sup>2</sup>

Before reviewing the history, it is important to note the two main ways in which the racial formation process experienced by Arab Americans differs from that of other non-white groups (i.e. Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos). First, the racialization of Arab Americans does not align with the traditional argument of racial inferiority, which was used to support the development of the United States as a country of white privilege. Rather, the burgeoning of Arab racial formation occurred during the civil rights era, when legal discrimination was considered illegitimate. This meant that Arab Americans were in relatively good socioeconomic positions and experienced fewer legislative and economic barriers than other non-white

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<sup>1</sup> Louise Calkins, "The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 25, No. 2-3 (Winter 2016): 250.

<sup>2</sup> Louise Calkins and Saher Selod, "Review of Race Scholarship and the War on Terror," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2018): 165–177.

groups.<sup>3</sup> Second, the racialization of Arab Americans corresponds with the work of David Roediger, who demonstrates how those perceived to fit on racial margins can produce and experience “racial” shifts.<sup>4</sup> According to this theory, groups once seen as non-white can become white and thus to claim a range of benefits accorded to whiteness. The opposite flip can also occur, which is the case of Arab Americans.

The onset of changes in the identity of Arab Americans is traceable to the emergence of the United States as a global superpower.<sup>5</sup> From securing oil resources to ensuring the stability of the Israeli state, by the mid-1960s, American foreign policy interests were thoroughly intertwined in the Middle East. To some extent, a domestic expression of Arab racism was necessary to manufacture the public consent needed to support, finance, and defend American foreign policies in the Middle East. In order to “sell” the American foreign policy agenda, American political leadership and popular media outlets resorted to mythmaking, strategically vilifying Arabs.<sup>6</sup> The media adopted a rhetoric of moral superiority to justify its various interventions in the Middle East.

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<sup>3</sup> “The Social Construction of the Arab (and Muslim) American,” in *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11*, edited by Louise A. Cainkar (Russell Sage Foundation, 2009): 66

<sup>4</sup> David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (New York, NY: Verso Books, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Michael W. Suleiman, *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Susan Akram and Kevin Johnson, “Race, Civil Rights, and Immigration Law after September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslim,” *New York University Annual Survey of American Law*, Vol. 58 (2002).

Since this time, persistent, negative media representations as of Arabs have been a common expression of anti-Arab racism.<sup>7</sup>

Erecting depreactive constructions of the Arab in popular culture and in political discourses did not require major work or innovation. Orientalist tropes dating back to the Middle Ages of Europe were revived and deployed. For example, Western perceptions of Muslims as “unreasoning” and “absolutist” helped build popular support for the Crusades.<sup>8</sup> Today, remnants of this “authoritarian Arab” trope have been used to justify U.S. intervention in the Middle East. American scholar Edward Said coined the term “orientalism” to describe the ongoing pattern of scholarship that imagines, exaggerates, and distorts differences of Arab peoples and cultures as compared to that of Europe and the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Orientalism involves seeing Arab culture as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and dangerous, and it purports Arabs’ decision-making and undertakings do not have “any foundation in grievances, prior violence, or continuing conflicts.”<sup>10</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, orientalist tropes, which developed over the period of European Enlightenment and colonization of the Arab World, were readily available for use by American political leadership and media.<sup>11</sup> A 1921 film called *The Sheik*, for example, told the story of an Arab man who kidnaps a white woman and holds her

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s (Critical Social Thought)*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>10</sup> “The MESA Debate: The Scholars, the Media, and the Middle East,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Winter, 1987): 95.

<sup>11</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

captive. This was the first of countless films and books to depict Arab men as “sheiks” and “terrorists,” which has popularized the belief that Arab men are dangerous romancers, rapists, and greedy. These representations have induced a perception of the Arab world as perpetually chaotic and unstable, containing cities overflowing with people driven by emotions. Americans have come to assume that all twenty-two widely varying Arab countries (stretching from shores of the Atlantic Ocean in North Africa to the Gulf in Asia) are the same, united in their inborn cultural dispositions and hatred of the West.<sup>12</sup>

### *Consequences of the Arab-Israeli War*

Contemporary Arab racialization has been traced to a specific moment in U.S. history: June 1967, when U.S. support for Israel in the Arab-Israeli war began to situate Arab culture and history as adversarial to American interests. In brief, the U.S. government supported Israel and its occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, and parts of Egypt and Syria. American media coverage of the war, which, almost unanimously celebrated Israel’s conquest, utilized anti-Arab tropes to do so.<sup>13</sup> The shock for Arab Americans was not necessarily the defeat, but rather, the way it was received in the United States. In the media, derogatory racial connotations toward Arabs contributed

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<sup>12</sup> “The Social Construction of the Arab (and Muslim) American,” 86.

<sup>13</sup> Rashid Khalidi and Lisa Anderson, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993).



substantially to a growing political and ethnic awareness in the Arab American community.”<sup>14</sup>

The Arab-Israeli war has been deemed a “watershed” in Arab American history. Arab Americans were “shocked and traumatized by the 1967 war,” in particular by “how greatly one-sided and pro-Israeli the American communications media were in reporting on the Middle East.”<sup>15</sup> The American media depicted Arab defeat in the 1967 war as a victory, something Americans should identify with and be happy about. Both during the war and persistently after, negative portrayals of “backward” and “defeated” Arabs appeared in newspapers and on television. Palestinians were always presented in the media as the aggressors. Israelis, on the other hand, were depicted as victims of Palestinians’ aggression and had the right to defend themselves. A comprehensive study of BBC news coverage of the war, for instance, found differences in the language used by journalists for Israelis and Palestinians. It found that the terms “atrocious,” “brutal murder,” “savage cold-blooded killing,” and “slaughter” were used to describe Israeli casualties but not the death of Palestinians.<sup>16</sup>

By 1967, the United States was competing with the Soviet Union for global hegemony. U.S. foreign policies were dominated by three interests: anti-Communism, access to oil, and support for Israel. If Communism was public enemy number one throughout the Cold War, “Arab-ness” was considered the enemy of American interests

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<sup>14</sup> Gary Awad, “The Arab Americans: An Invisible Minority Awakens,” *New Circle*, (March 1981): 31.

<sup>15</sup> Suleiman, *Arabs in America*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Greg Philo and Mike Berry, *Bad News From Israel*, (Sterling, VA: Pluto Books, 2004).

in the Middle East. Accordingly, Arab identity was undergoing transformation in American society.<sup>17</sup> In the results of a poll taken by Pat Caddell's Cambridge Survey Research organization in 1975, there was some evidence to suggest that positive attitudes toward Israel correlated with a significant minority of Americans developing "close to racist" attitudes toward Arabs. The survey gave respondents a list of images and asked them: "Does each word apply more to the Arabs or more to the Israelis?" Over half said the terms "greedy," "arrogant," and "barbaric" apply to the Arabs. Conversely, very few described Arabs as "peaceful," "honest," "friendly," or "like Americans," while a majority used these terms to describe the Israelis. These portrayals were biased against Arabs and had a profoundly alienating effect on Arab Americans. Although Arabs in the United States were not the specific subjects of the stigmata and caricatures spreading through American media and popular culture, little could prevent the eventual imprinting of these stereotypes upon Arab Americans.<sup>18</sup> In response to U.S. government policies and American media representations of U.S. foreign policy, Arabs were forced to rethink their identities.

### *9/11: Racialized Notions Solidify*

In the years and decades following the Arab-Israeli war, Arab Americans found that they ceased to be embraced by the protections of whiteness. Rather, there was a preeminent binary logic of "us" versus "them." In this "us" versus "them" dichotomy, the

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<sup>17</sup> "The Social Construction of the Arab (and Muslim) American," 87.

<sup>18</sup> Juris Pupcenoks, *Western Muslims and Conflict Abroad: Conflict Spillovers to Diasporas*, (New York: Routledge, 2016): 148.

white mainstream has come to represent power and civilized humanity. The Arabs, on the other hand, are seen as weak, incompetent, and morally undeserving of controlling their own destiny. The political scientist Amaney Jamal writes about how this dichotomy has been consistently used in American media ever since the Arab-Israeli war. Jamal argues that “the contemporary racialization of Muslims and Arabs stems from the consistent deployment of an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality, excessively propped up for the justification of military campaigns in the Arab world.”<sup>19</sup> The “us” versus “them” dichotomy was constructed upon and is perpetuated by the myth of Arab racial difference. This myth has permeated American society and has become the lens through which mainstream America views Arab Americans.<sup>20</sup>

Although it is common for scholars to set 9/11 as the starting date of the racialization of Arabs, that moment in history is more accurately seen as a deepening and expanding of “War on Terror” processes already in place. Gallup News Service, in a review of historical polling data, found that anti-Arab sentiment dates back long before 9/11, noting “Americans traditionally have not held very positive views of Arabs.” Moreover, a February 1991 ABC poll taken during Desert Shield (ten years before 9/11) found that 59% of Americans associated the term “terrorists” with Arabs, and 56% of Americans associated the phrase “religious fanatics” with Arabs. A 1993 Gallup survey taken after the World Trade Center bombing revealed that 32% of Americans had an

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<sup>19</sup> “Amaney Jamal, “The Racialization of Muslim Americans,” in *Muslims in Western Politics*, edited by Abdulkader H. Sinno, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009): 203.

<sup>20</sup> Jamal, *Muslims in Western Politics*, 205.

“unfavorable” opinion of Arabs.<sup>21</sup> What’s more, a Pew Research Center opinion poll from March 2001 (several months before the 9/11 attacks) surveyed American attitudes toward Arabs and found that less than half of Americans polled (45%) reported a favorable view of Arabs.<sup>22</sup> The September 11th attacks only crystallized pre-existing negative, racialized, “us versus them” sentiments about Arabs.

For decades, Arab “whiteness” translated to some level of invisibility. After the events of 9/11, however, Arabs in America became more visible as a minority group,<sup>23</sup> and therefore, any previous privileges associated with their whiteness dwindled. After 9/11, Muslim Arabs, specifically, felt increased repercussions of xenophobia, religious exclusion, and everyday forms of violence, which intensified up until 2010 and has not fully faded since.<sup>24</sup> September 11 forced an ideological moment in the United States in which citizens and institutions of all kinds were united in the “War on Terror.” It is crucial, however, to note these consequences are not viewed as the result of special circumstances. Rather, this backlash has become ordinary as part of the aggregate of

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<sup>21</sup> Colonel Daniel Smith, “The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review: Here We Go Again – Or Do We?” *Weekly Defense Monitor* Vol 4, No. 9 (November 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Kohut, “Pew Global Attitudes Project: Views of a Changing World,” *The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press* (June 2003).  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2003/06/Views-Of-A-Changing-World-2003.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Louise A. Cainkar, “No Longer Invisible: Arab and Muslim Exclusion after September 11,” *Middle East Report*, No. 222 (Fall 2002): 23.

<sup>24</sup> Junaid Rana, “More than Nothing: The Persistence of Islamophobia in “Post Racial” Racism,” *Global Dialogue*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Spring 2010).

histories of violence and persecution authorized by several centuries of the U.S. racial state.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Leerom Medovoi, “Dogma-Line Racism: Islamophobia and the Second Axis of Race,” *Social Text*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2012): 46.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### From Racialization to Islamophobia

*Sadly, it looks like Mexico's Police and Military are unable to stop the Caravan heading to the Southern Border of the United States. Criminals and unknown Middle Easterners are mixed in. I have alerted Border Patrol and Military that this is a National Emergency.*

*Must change laws!*  
(@realDonaldTrump)

### *Arab-Muslims: Connection and Conflation*

As a result of confusion and conflation, an expanded social construction has emerged that melds the Arab and the Muslim together: “the Middle Easterner.” The actionable but sloppy category of “Middle Easterners” has become a useful term with which to accurately describe the targets of the politically and socially motivated discrimination in the United States.<sup>1</sup> In the Middle Easterner construct, similar social constructions about Arabs have been seamlessly extended to Muslims and vice versa. Accordingly, Arabs and Muslims have come to be viewed in an undifferentiated way, sharing certain psychological traits, phenotype, set of religious beliefs and practices, and specific countries of origin. As such, it is difficult to untangle American stereotypes about Arabs from those applied to Muslims. The Middle Easterner, then, is a conflation

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<sup>1</sup> Louise A. Cainkar, “Social Construction of Arab Americans,” . *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 25, No. 2-3 (Winter-Spring 2006): 262.

of race, ethnicity, and national origin, with religion--which distinguishes the Middle Easterner from other brown-skinned ethnoracial groups in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

While Muslims do not compose a “race,” they have experienced a process of racial formation, spurred on by American media narratives and political agendas. Omi and Winant defined racialization as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group.”<sup>3</sup> This definition provides the much-needed language to conceptually explain how religion can acquire racial meaning, allowing Muslim experiences to be understood through a lens of racism.<sup>4</sup>

According to their commonly accepted meanings, “Arab” and “Muslim” are not mutually inclusive terms. While the former relates to an ethno-linguistic group with links to the Arabian peninsula and surrounding territories, the latter refers to followers of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Not all Arabs--those living in the Middle East as well as those living the United States or in diaspora communities around the world--are Muslim. Rather, 60% of Arab Americans are Christian.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, not all Muslims are ethno-linguistically Arab. In fact, the largest Muslim populations in the world are all in non-Arabic speaking countries: Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, among others. Only 18% of the

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<sup>2</sup> Nadine Naber, Ambiguous insiders: an investigation of Arab American invisibility,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015): 111

<sup>4</sup> Steve Garner and Saher Selod, “The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia,” *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2015): 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. “Muslim,” accessed April 1, 2019, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100218686>

<sup>6</sup> “Demographics,” *Arab American Institute*, <https://www.aaiusa.org/demographics>.

global Muslim population are Arab.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the American Muslim population is particularly heterogeneous. According to data collected in 2017, there are about 3.3 million Muslims of all ages living in the United States, and no single racial or ethnic group makes up for more than 30% of the total Muslim population.<sup>8</sup> Overall, 30% describe themselves as white, 23% as black, 21% as Asian, 6% as Hispanic, and 19% as other or mixed race. Despite the diversity of the Muslim community in the United States, Muslims have been unified in American consciousness, primarily because “the Muslim” and “the Arab” have been conflated.

Arab-Muslim amalgamation can be traced back to the mid-1960s and intersected historically with two significant processes toward the end of the twentieth century:

1. increased Arab immigration to the United States in which the larger proportion of immigrants were Muslim, not Christian, which was a reversal of early patterns;
2. the global spread of Islamic revival, which produced increased religiosity among Muslims, including Muslim Americans, and the concordant rise of Islamist political movements, many of which opposed U.S. foreign policy interests and some of which engaged in armed violence to express that opposition.

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<sup>7</sup> Zane Pratt, “Common Confusions about Arabs and Muslims: Seeking Clarity on a Vital Subject,” *Jenkins Center for a Christian Understanding of Islam*, January 6, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Craig Considine, “The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and ‘Flying while Brown,’” *Religions*, Vol. 8, No. 9 (2017).



By the mid-1960s, the majority of Arab immigrants to the United States were Muslims from Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf.<sup>9</sup> This transition from majority Christian to majority Muslim immigrants preceded the global Islamic revival. The wave of Islamic revival began in the Middle East 1970s as a result of widespread disappointment with the secular and Westernized ruling elites. Authoritarian leaders had dominated the Muslim world for decades, leading ineffectively and lacking cultural authenticity.<sup>10</sup> Among other explanations, the Islamic revival was also a backlash against Western influence, which was seen as subverting Islamic values and identities. Abroad, major events of the Islamic revival, such as the 1979 Iranian revolution, evoked intense enmity against America and had a consequential effect on American foreign policy. Domestically, the Islamic revival was a religious impetus that resulted in increased levels of religiosity among previously secularized Muslims Americans. Many Muslim Americans adopted Islamic modes of dress, praying five times a day, and other lifestyle changes. The institutional effect of the Islamic revival was an increased number of mosques and Islamic schools. The sizes of mosque congregations grew, and there was expanded access to commercial entities that support a Muslim lifestyle, such as Halal meat markets and modest women's clothing stores. What's more, many Muslim Americans shifted their primary affiliation from secular to religious and began to identify as "Muslim" first, before any other aspects of personal identity.<sup>11</sup> The convergence of

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<sup>9</sup> Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History*, (Olive Branch Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Louise A. Cainkar, "No Longer Invisible: Arab and Muslim Exclusion after September 11," *Middle East Report*, Vol. 224 (2002).

these trends--the increased number of Muslims in America and the heightened religiosity of Muslims--rendered Muslim Americans more visible in the public sphere.<sup>12</sup>

Increased visibility of Muslims corresponded with several major events in American relations with the Middle East, such as the 1985 Iran-Contra affair, the 1990s Persian Gulf wars, the hijacking of TWA flight 1985, the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. In the wake of these events, American political actors, commentators, and non-Muslim religious leaders suggested that Islam itself was intrinsically faulty and promoted violence, which produced an understanding in America that Muslims pose a threat, both at home and abroad.<sup>13</sup> This has lasted until today and is the anchoring ideology behind War on Terror policies. Today's Middle Easterners are the focus of a variety of American governmental interventions that include racial profiling, surveillance, and targeting by security and intelligence forces.

*"The Middle Easterner": The Arab Muslim Archetype*

As an amalgamation of Arab and Muslim, "Middle Easterners" have been racialized through a combination of features, such as phenotype, ethnic and religious cues, and psychological traits.<sup>14</sup> Firstly, the Middle Easterner archetype draws heavily

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Cainkar, "Social Construction of Arab Americans," 261.

<sup>14</sup> Bradley J. Zopf, "A Different Kind of Brown: Arabs and Middle Easterners as Anti-American Muslims," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2018): 185.

upon observable elements of appearance and culture.<sup>15</sup> A particular phenotype, for instance, has come to be associated with the Middle Easterner: dark-skinned, dark-haired.<sup>16</sup> Popular portrayals of Middle Eastern men feature swarthy complexions and hook noses.<sup>17</sup> This dark phenotype is often fused with visible expressions of Muslim culture and identity, such as the hijab for women and keffiyeh (a headdress often worn in the Middle East) and beards for men. This imagined phenotype is very closely connected with the Middle Easterner archetype. This is made clear in the fact that, specifically after 9/11, thousands of Arabs, Muslims, Sikhs, and individuals who appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent have been the victims of discrimination, harassment, profiling, and verbal and physical assault.<sup>18</sup> A quintessential example of the influence of the Middle Eastern archetype is the story of Balbir Singh. Mr. Singh was a small business owner in Arizona. As a Sikh, Mr. Singh wore a turban and donned a beard. In September 2001, days after 9/11, he was murdered in a hate crime. Mr. Singh was not Arab, Muslim, or Middle Eastern, but because Sikh men fit within the racialized caricature of Middle Easterners, they have become the victims of racialized hate crimes.<sup>19</sup> While the racialized Middle

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<sup>15</sup> Considine, “The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and ‘Flying while Brown.’”

<sup>16</sup> Cainkar, “Social Construction of Arab Americans,” 251.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>18</sup> Lori A. Peek, “An Exploratory Comparison of Disasters, Riots and Terrorist Acts,” *Disasters*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2003): 271.

<sup>19</sup> Liyna Anwar and Cameron Jenkins, “‘People Saw Only A Turban And A Beard’: Reflecting On A Post-Sept. 11 Death,” *NPR Morning Edition*, September 14, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/14/647426417/people-saw-only-a-turban-and-a-beard-reflecting-on-a-post-sept-11-death>.

Easterner phenotype is anchored in a set of visual expectations, it is both powerful and adaptable.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the Middle Eastern archetype asserts all Arab Muslims think in the same way, react in the same manner, and respond holistically. At that, Middle Easterners have been racialized as sharing several negative psychological traits. Most notably, Middle Easterners are purportedly “dangerous” and “terrorist.” Americans are constantly bombarded with negative representations and stories in which Arab Muslims are terrorists. This message is disseminated through both a multitude of fictional representations and a disproportionate amount of media exposure to certain real-world events. The preponderance of negative media coverage of Arab Muslims cannot be explained away as merely news coverage of violent events. In fact, a 2017 study, found that when the perpetrator of a terrorist attack is Muslim, viewers receive about four and a half times more media coverage (449%) than if the perpetrator was not Muslim. In other words, a perpetrator who is not Muslim would have to kill on average about seven more people to receive the same amount of coverage as a perpetrator who is Muslim.<sup>21</sup> What’s more, fictional representations, media coverage, and political conversations about Arab Muslims are harshly pejorative. A 1983 study concluded that popular media narratives

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<sup>20</sup> Saher Selod, “Imagining the Radicalized Muslim: Race, Anti-Muslim Discourse, and Media Narratives of the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombers,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2018): 199.

<sup>21</sup> Erin Kearns, “Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention Than Others?,” *Justice Quarterly*, Forthcoming. Available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2928138](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2928138).

equated the term “Middle Easterner” with the term “terrorist”.<sup>22</sup> For example, immediately after the the 1995 Oklahoma City federal building bombing “terrorism expert,” Steven Emerson, proclaimed on national television (CBS News) that the attacks had a “Middle Eastern trait.”<sup>23</sup> This became a line reporters used repeated, even after the bomber was found to be a white, U.S. army veteran. A poll conducted the same year asked Americans to describe Arabs and Muslims, and a large percentage of respondents used the adjectives “barbaric,” “cruel,” “treacherous,” “warlike,” and “bloodthirsty.”<sup>24</sup> This trend has been taken even further since the launch of the “War on Terror” as a response to global terrorism. Incriminating media coverage and political rhetoric have continued to paint a picture of Middle Easterners as irrational, terror-supporting, and fanatical. Thus, the Middle Easterner is not only racialized as different from the mainstream but also as threatening to the mainstream.

### *The Conceptual Connection Between Racism and Islamophobia*

Islamophobia is not a new term. Dating back centuries, the word emerged from European colonial encounters with Muslim populations and was used to describe

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<sup>22</sup> Louise A. Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11*, (Russell Sage Foundation, 2009): 258.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Naureckas, “Oklahoma City Bombing: The Jihad that Wasn’t,” *FAIR*. <https://fair.org/extra/the-oklahoma-city-bombing/>. Accessed on March 1, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11*, 245.

European anger and hatred toward Islam as the enemy of Western civilization.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, some scholars have connected the contemporary concept to the French word *islamophobie*, which was used in 1910 to criticize French colonial administrators for their treatment of Muslim subjects. At that time, “Islamophobia” primarily denoted prejudice and hostility toward Muslims and did not, to the same extent that it does today, describe an irrational fear of Islam.

All of that said, the contemporary popularization of the term “Islamophobia” can be traced back to a series of studies in the 1990s by the Runnymede Trust, a British think tank that grapples with racism and ethnic prejudice. A 1997 report entitled “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All” documented “closed” views of Islam in the U.K., including perceptions of the religion as a single, monolithic bloc that is barbaric, sexist, and engaged in terrorist activities. Since then, Islamophobia has become a common concept used to describe both discrimination against and fear of Muslims. A boon of scholarship using the term “Islamophobia” appeared after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.<sup>26</sup> Andrew Shyrock, a professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, has described Islamophobia as an “unfounded hostility toward Islam,” that results in “unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities.”<sup>27</sup> Scholars of the Georgetown Bridge Initiative have defined Islamophobia as “an extreme fear of and antipathy toward Islam and Muslims, which often leads to social and political

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<sup>25</sup> Louise A. Cainkar, “Review of Race Scholarship in the War on Terror,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2018): 183.

<sup>26</sup> Garner and Selod, “The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia.”

<sup>27</sup> Cainkar, “Review of Race Scholarship in the War on Terror,” 185.

discrimination and can be used to rationalize violence manifested in hate crimes and military attacks.”<sup>28</sup> In 2018, Khaled Beydoun, an American law professor wrote *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* as a response to the lack of a legal definition for Islamophobia. In the book, Beydoun defines three kinds of American Islamophobia: 1. Private Islamophobia, 2. Dialectical Islamophobia, and 3. Structural Islamophobia. Most importantly for our purposes, Baydoun describes private Islamophobia is the fear, suspicion, and violent targeting of Muslims by private actors. Dialectal Islamophobia, on the other hand, is the process by which the prejudice of government institutions shapes, reshapes and endorses views or attitudes about Islam and Muslim subjects.<sup>29</sup>

All of the above definitions, and several others, illustrate that the exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam are perpetuated by negative stereotypes and narratives and result in bias, discrimination, and marginalization of Muslims.<sup>30</sup> Realizing these trends, the concept of *racialization* helps to capture and rationalize the formation of the American Islamophobic narrative.<sup>31</sup> Islamophobia, then, can be understood as a specific form of racism targeting Muslims. Thinking about Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism allows for a more accurate reflection on the role of race in shaping American Islamophobia. The framework of racialization explains how, despite racial, ethnic, and

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<sup>28</sup> “What is Islamophobia?” *Georgetown University Bridge Initiative*. <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/about-us/what-is-islamophobia/>. Accessed on February 15, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Khaled Beydoun, *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir, “Fear, Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America,” *Center for American Progress* (August 2011): 9.

<sup>31</sup> Garner and Selod, “The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia,” 13.

national origin diversity, Muslims are singled-out, “identified, [and] given stereotypical characteristics,”<sup>32</sup> ostensibly resulting in the construction of a “Muslim race.”

The racialization of Muslims has assessed Muslims’ habits, beliefs, behaviors, and values as they compare to the dominant mainstream,<sup>33</sup> focusing on determining a dichotomy of socio-cultural inferiority and superiority. Because of this, religion – as a sign of cultural difference – has become a marker of identity riddled with negative associations.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, those who are identified as Muslim have racial experiences in their everyday lives.

### *Islamophobia, as Shaped by Racism*

Islamophobia cannot be entirely divorced from racism.<sup>35</sup> The process of Middle Easterner racialization has not only normalized and rationalized Islamophobia, but it has also shaped Islamophobic rhetoric and narrative. American Islamophobia rarely engages religious questions in a meaningful way. Instead, it is tainted by racial constructions and

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<sup>32</sup> Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake, "Racism out of place: thoughts on whiteness and an antiracist geography in the new millennium," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2000): 393.

<sup>33</sup> Saher Selod and David G. Embrick, “Racialization and Muslims: Situating the Muslim Experience in Race Scholarship,” *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 7, No. 8 (August 2013): 648.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond Taras, “Islamophobia never stands still’: race, religion, and culture,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2013): 421.

<sup>35</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, (New York: The New Press, 1996): 10.



biases. Following are several Islamophobic tropes/beliefs that have been shaped by the “Middle Easterner” archetype:

- Islam is a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change.
- Islam is anti-modern, anti-Western, and more specifically, anti-American.
- Islam is violent, aggressive, threatening, and supportive of terrorism.
- Islam is synonymous with patriarchy and misogyny.<sup>36</sup>
- Islam is separate and Other; it does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them, and does not influence them.

While each of these Islamophobic beliefs stems, to some extent, from racialized notions of Muslims and orientalist interpretations of Islam, three in particular can be traced to American anti-Middle Easterner racism.

First, the formation of the Middle Easterner archetype has manufactured the notion that Islam is monolithic and that all Muslims believe, feel, think, and act as one. Even while Islamic schools and branches vary in their practices and teachings, Islam is viewed as undivided and unchanging. There is an enormous degree of diversity in the beliefs and lifestyles of adherents of Islam, yet Muslims are seen as united and intransigent. When religion is racialized, it results in the conflation of race and religion such that religion, like race, is seen as an immutable and essential. Rather than Islam being understood as a system of chosen beliefs, American Islamophobia perceives it as an unassimilable aspect of one’s identity.<sup>37</sup> A prominent example of this is the fact that

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Martinez HoSang, “Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century,” (University of California Press: 2012): 6.

<sup>37</sup> Bradley J. Zopf, “Racializing “Muslims”: Constructing a Muslim Archetype,” PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2015, abstract in *U.S. Studies Online*.

visible archetypes have become attached to a Muslims.<sup>38</sup> A 1995 study, for instance, found people read “Muslimness” onto individuals by using a combination of ideas about culture and appearance. In reality, “looking like” a Muslim means different things to different people and in different places. Even so, the Islamophobic lens that views Islam as a monolith defines what are considered conspicuous markers of Islam (hijab, jilbaab, a Muslim name, nation of origin, etc.).<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, the perception of Islam as a monolith has led to “collective blame,” when the whole is punished for the actions of a few. That is to say that when a few extremist individuals commit a violent atrocity, American Islamophobia holds all Muslims collectively culpable. We see collective blame rear its head after an act of terror committed by a member of the Islamic faith. “Maybe most [Muslims are] peaceful, but until they recognize and destroy their growing jihadist cancer they must be held responsible,” Rupert Murdoch tweeted after the 2015 terrorist attack in France.<sup>40</sup> By virtue of sharing a religion with the culprits of a terrorist attack, Muslims everywhere are either blamed for the violence or expected to condemn the violence. President Donald Trump, for example, has retweeted Islamophobic propaganda videos.<sup>41</sup> The videos

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<sup>38</sup> Nadine Naber, “Ambiguous insiders: an investigation of Arab American invisibility,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2000).

<sup>39</sup> Steve Garner and Saher Selod, “The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia,” 12.

<sup>40</sup> Rupert Murdoch (@rupertmurdoch), “Maybe most Moslems peaceful, but until they recognize and destroy their growing jihadist cancer they must be held responsible.” January 9, 2015, Tweet.

<sup>41</sup> Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “VIDEO: Muslim Migrant beats up Dutch Boy on Crutches,” November 29, 2017, Retweet.

purport to demonstrate the dangers Muslims pose to Western society. Trump's retweets fit with a pattern<sup>42</sup>: He, like many other Americans, feels that the whole of Islam, collectively, is a threat to the United States. Trump treats Muslims as a monolith, a group of millions who deserve to be banned from the United States. There is nothing logical about condemning millions of people for the actions of a few. Collective culpability is only "logical" within an Islamophobic narrative that views Islam as a monolith.

Second, in American Islamophobic rhetoric, Islam is viewed as irreconcilable with Western values and society. Islamophobic logic cannot rationalize how a person can be both Muslim and "American." This means Muslims' allegiance to America is often questioned. This is because Islam is propagated as inherently inimical to Western values of democracy, equality, and tolerance and hostile to Western Christianity. Rather than deeply consider how Islam, like other major world religions, adapts and varies according to the cultural context in which it exists, American Islamophobia has adopted a narrow view of Islam as a faith that is entirely antithetical to the West. The hijab, for example, is associated with inequality and the subordination of women, rather than evidence of women's agency.<sup>43</sup> When a woman wears a hijab her American-ness is questioned, as it is assumed she is not from the United States. She is perceived as someone who lacks American values, not someone who is employing them.<sup>44</sup> In March 2019, for example, a

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<sup>42</sup> MPower Change, "86 Times Donald Trump Displayed or Promoted Islamophobia," *Medium*, April 19, 2018.  
<https://medium.com/nilec/86-times-donald-trump-displayed-or-promoted-islamophobia-49e67584ac10>.

<sup>43</sup> Selod and Embrick, "Racialization and Muslims: Situating the Muslim Experience in Race Scholarship," 650.

<sup>44</sup> Saher Selod, "Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim American Men and Women Post 9-11," *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2015): 84.

host on Fox News implied that U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar, a Muslim Somali-American politician, might not be loyal to America because she wears a hijab.<sup>45</sup> Pirro further insinuated that because Representative Omar adheres to Islam, she cannot also adhere to the U.S. Constitution. According to Pirro, “sharia law is antithetical to the constitution.”<sup>46</sup>

American Islamophobia not only deems Islam irreconcilable with Western values, but it declares Islam as anti-American. Muslims are perceived as inherently opposed to democracy, freedom, and Western values.<sup>47</sup> Muslim women are seen as a threat to Western cultural values while Muslim men are treated as a threat to national security.<sup>48</sup> After 9/11, for example, both former President Bush and the U.S. mainstream media explained the attacks as driven by hatred for western society. In his address at a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001 President Bush famously posed a question that followed this Islamophobic logic: "Why do they hate us?"<sup>49</sup> More recently, in 2017, President Trump claimed in a CNN interview that "Islam hates us." Shortly follow this statement, in the same interview, President Trump went on to justify the then-proposed

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<sup>45</sup> Daniel Martinez HoSang, “Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century,” 6.

<sup>46</sup> Sophie Weiner, “Fox News Host Jeanine Pirro Says Ilhan Omar's Hijab Means She Supports Sharia Law,” *Splinter News*, March 10, 2019, <https://splinternews.com/fox-news-host-jeanine-pirro-says-ilhan-omars-hijab-mean-1833193984>.

<sup>47</sup> Selod and Embrick, “Racialization and Muslims: Situating the Muslim Experience in Race Scholarship,” 650.

<sup>48</sup> Selod, “Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim American Men and Women Post 9-11,” 87.

<sup>49</sup> LibertyShorts, "Bush - Why do they hate us? " *YouTube*, Online video clip, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PKRHgmHzK0>.

Muslim travel ban saying, "We can't allow people coming into this country who have this hatred of the United States."<sup>50</sup> What's more, during his campaign, President Trump accused Former President Obama of being a Muslim. In an auxiliary interview following up about such claims, President Trump stated, "I don't know if he loves America." This response exemplifies the racialized notion that Muslims (especially those within the Middle Easterner archetype) hate America.<sup>51</sup>

Third, American Islamophobia is fueled and perpetuated by the racialized social imagery of Islam as the source of "the Middle Eastern terrorist." This caricature captures the inhuman savagery and evil that is consonant with terrorism, fusing these qualities with Islam and its followers. American Islamophobia, however, does not engage in a theological back-and-forth about the nature of violence in religious texts. Rather, an image of "the radical Islamic terrorist"<sup>52</sup> has obstructed any meaningful conversation about *jihad* as a foundational Islamic concept.

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<sup>50</sup> CNN, "Donald Trump: 'I think Islam hates us'," *YouTube*, Online video clip, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-Zj0tfZY6o>.

<sup>51</sup> Chris Moody and Kristen Holmes, "Donald Trump's history of suggesting Obama is a Muslim," *CNN*, September 18, 2015. <https://www.cnn.com/2015/09/18/politics/trump-obama-muslim-birther/index.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Bradley J. Zopf, "A Different Kind of Brown: Arabs and Middle Easterners as Anti-American Muslims."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Survey Analysis

Between November 2018 and March 2019, I distributed an online survey through which I aimed to gather a better picture of how racialization has affected Americans' views of Islam and shaped American Islamophobic narratives. I administered the survey to 189 Texas residents of or above voting age (18+ years). The survey questions varied; some were open-ended while others were multiple choice. To analyze the qualitative survey responses (i.e. the open-ended responses), I used a deductive approach, using my research questions as a guide for grouping and analyzing the data. In this chapter, I will review several of the results, and I will offer an analysis about how the results do or do not align with the racialization phenomenon I have described in previous sections of this paper.

#### *Selected Results*

##### *1. In your own opinion and words, what are "American Values?"*

This was the first question in the survey. Responses to this question were meant to gain a sense of how respondents understand mainstream American societal values. Most notably, 10% of respondents explicitly indicated "Christian values" or "Christianity"

while only 8% of respondents explicitly mentioned “Freedom of religion” as an American value.

## *2. Is the United States a Christian country?*

54% of respondents said “yes” to this multiple choice question. Nearly 75% of people living in the United States identify as Christian.<sup>1</sup> Throughout American history, white Christians have represented cultural, political, and economic domination.<sup>2</sup> This was not an open-ended question, meaning there was not space for respondents to explain why they indicated “yes.” There may be some variation between those who believe the United States *is* a Christian nation and those who believe it *should be* or *was meant to be* a Christian nation. Since the 2016 presidential elections, in particular, there has been a growing focus on understanding Christian nationalism, which refers to the pervasive set of beliefs and ideals that merge American and Christian group memberships—along with their histories and futures.<sup>3</sup>

\*Note: This survey begins with several biographical questions. One of these biographical questions was open-ended and was meant to gauge religious affiliation: *How do you identify religiously, if at all?* Of the respondents who indicated that the United States is a Christian Country, 97% identified as Christian.

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<sup>1</sup> “America’s Changing Religious Landscape.” *Pew Research Center*, Washington, D.C. (November 2018) <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Massari, “Worry in white, Christian America,” *The Harvard Gazette* (February 2018) <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/02/divinity-school-speaker-examines-worry-in-white-christian-america/>.

<sup>3</sup> Philip S. Gorski, “Civil Religion Today.” *Association of Religion Data Archives Guiding Paper Series* (2010) <http://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers/Gorski.pdf>.

### 3. *What are Islamic values? (i.e. values that an adherent to Islam holds)*

This open-ended question gauged respondents' understanding and perception of Islam. 15% of respondents utilized words, phrases, and tropes that have been closely associated with "the Middle Easterner" archetype I described in Chapter 4. A sampling of the responses are as follows:

- "They adhere to the Koran, which teaches about killing and ruling others."
- "Islamic values teach Muslims to never befriend a Christian or a Jew."
- "Theoretically, they have similar values to Christians, but they have much less tolerance for people who are different."
- "Blind obedience."
- "Submission to Allah; patriarchy; hierarchy."
- "Blind devotion."
- "No emphasis on individualism. The value the opposite of pluralism is."
- "Moralistic to an extreme."

These responses align with some of the major racialized trends associated with the Middle Easterner archetype, including "undemocratic," "anti-Western," and "dangerous." In the framework of racialization, stereotypes and tropes are produced, reproduced, and solidified into a racial identity.

\*Note: 17% of respondents wrote "I don't know" or "Unsure" when asked to describe Islamic values. This means only 68% of responses included neutral or factual explanations of Islamic values.



#### 4. Do Islamic values “clash” with American values?

30% of respondents said “yes.” The Arab Muslim world has been socially constructed in American popular perception as “inherently undemocratic.” Because of this, a fundamental, irreconcilable “us” versus “them”<sup>4</sup> dichotomy has developed. This dichotomy has shaped the Islamophobic narrative by asserting that “Islamic culture” is nefarious and antithetical to “American culture.” This trend and a similar analysis can also be used to understand some of the responses to question #8 below.

#### 5. In a few words or sentences, how would you describe a Muslim?

Similar to the findings from question #3, when asked to describe a Muslim, 25% of respondents utilized racialized terms that are common in American Islamophobic rhetoric. Responses included:

- “Oppressive and intolerant to both non-believers and women.”
- “Radical.”
- “Very radical believers that stick to the rules.”
- “Hidden and careful around outsiders.”
- “Probably darker in skin tone and has a beard (I’m just describing what I think a Muslim looks like in my head).”
- “Closed-minded and strong-willed.”
- “Evil.”
- “Only stereotypes are coming to mind.”

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<sup>4</sup> Amaney Jamal, “The Racialization of Muslim Americans,” in *Muslims in Western Politics*, ed. Abdulkhader H. Sinno, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 203.

- “Mysterious.”
- “Many are prejudice against Americans and have been led to believe we are all evil people with loose morals.”
- “They appear to be intolerant of other faiths.”
- “Someone who can never be trusted to be a friend.”

One respondent offered what was most likely intended as an understanding and inclusive response: “Just like normal Americans.” While it can perhaps be inferred that the intention of this response was to assert that Muslims are no different from other Americans, the word “normal” implies that non-Muslims comprise the American mainstream. Another respondent said, “Middle Eastern (That is a stereotype, of course, but it is the first thing that pops into my head).” This response aligns with the phenomenon of Arab-Muslim conflation. Overwhelmingly, Americans assume Muslims are Arab and Arabs are Muslim.

#### *6. Are Muslims loyal to the United States or not?*

Only 40% of respondents believed Muslims are loyal to the United States. These results are notable for two reasons. First, disloyalty to the U.S. is a common stereotype about “the Middle Easterner,” and the shared feeling that Muslims are disloyal to the U.S. is a crucial component of American Islamophobia. Second, perceptions of disloyalty fan the flames of Islamophobia. If a person thinks Muslims are not loyal, that person may also believe Muslims should be not trusted and even feared.

*7. Do Arab Muslims from other countries harbor unfavorable opinions of the United States?*

This question aimed to gauge whether respondents believed Arab Muslim immigrants possess “anti-American” sentiments, which is an idea deeply rooted in American Islamophobia narratives. 34% of respondents indicated they believe Arab Muslims hold a very unfavorable opinion of the United States. Those who responded “No, Arab Muslims do not harbor unfavorable opinions of the United States” were much more likely to also have responded “Yes, Muslims are loyal to the United States” in the previous survey question. Even so, the majority (78%) of respondents who indicated “Yes, Muslims are loyal to the United States” still indicated that some Arab Muslims have unfavorable views of America.

*8. Which of the following are possible explanations for the 9/11 attacks:*

- *U.S. Intervention: It’s because of U.S. intervention in the Middle East.*
- *Extremist Beliefs: It’s because of the extremist beliefs of a few terrorists.*
- *Religious Conflict: It’s because of the conflict between Christianity and Judaism on one side and Islam on the other side.*
- *Clash of Values: It’s because the U.S. believes in democracy, freedom, and equal rights for women.*

In this question, respondents could indicate any, all, or none of the four options. This question did not ask the respondent to rank the explanations. The first most common choice was “Extremist Beliefs,” and the next most common choice was “Clash of

Civilizations.” Of the respondents who indicated “Extremist Beliefs,” however, 90% also indicated “Clash of Civilizations.” This might suggest that even while 9/11 can be understood as an extreme, isolated incident, it is not disconnected from the underlying belief that Islam is fundamentally incompatible with American society. In this view, American culture and Western civilization are deemed superior. According to this logic, terrorism is not the modus operandi of a few radical individuals. Rather, it is the by-product of a larger cultural and civilizational heritage: the Islamic Other.<sup>5</sup> In 1990 article by Bernard Lewis called “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” the author most notably introduced the argument that there was a “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West. This idea was popularized by Samuel Huntington’s piece *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking World Order*” in which he hypothesized that groups’ cultural and religious identities would one day be the primary source of conflict in the world. This argument has led to a version of Islamophobia that claims Muslims deviate from normative, Western cultural citizenship and, thus, pose a threat to the United States. In this argument, the dominant social culture in the United States (i.e. the white, traditionally-Christian, mainstream) must position itself vis-a-vis the Muslim Arab sub-population. This “us” versus “them” dichotomy has led many Americans to believe they were attacked on 9/11 because Americans are fundamentally “good” while the Arab Muslim Other is fundamentally “evil.”

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<sup>5</sup> Amaney Jamal, “The Racialization of Muslim Americans,” page 205.

9. *The U.S. Department of State outlined guidelines which say visa applicants from six predominantly Muslim countries (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan and Libya) must prove a close family relationship with a US resident in order to enter the country. This is often referred to as the "Muslim Ban." Knowing this, do you support or oppose these new guidelines?"*

52% of respondents indicated they “somewhat support” or “strongly support” the restrictions on Muslim travel to the United States. As seen in previous survey results, Arab Muslims are racialized as anti-American, and many believe their allegiance to the United States is not possible because of religion. Popular opinions such as these were utilized to justify President Trump’s executive order restricting Muslim immigration. The President’s order states, “In order to protect Americans, the United States must ensure those admitted to the country do not bear hostile attitudes toward it and its founding principles<sup>6</sup>.” This statement is evidence of an ingrained belief that Arab Muslims are opposed to American values and culture and, therefore, represent the preeminent threat to the national security of the United States.

The President’s rhetoric pathologizes Arab culture and Islamic faith,<sup>7</sup> further solidifying a fear that “radical Islamic terrorism” as something that stems not only from the seven pinpointed Muslim-majority countries but originates from all Arab, Muslim, Middle Easterners.

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<sup>6</sup> “Executive Order 13769 of January 27, 2017, Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” *United States Code*, Title 8 (2017): 127, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2016-title8/pdf/USCODE-2016-title8-chap12-subchapII-partII-sec1182.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Bradley J. Zopf, “A Different Kind of Brown: Arabs and Middle Easterners as Anti-American Muslims,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (2018): 178–191.

\*Note: Even respondents who indicated they believe 9/11 was conducted by a few extremists indicated their support for the “Muslim ban.”

10. *Should these guidelines be extended to all visa applicants?*

While a majority of respondents supported the travel ban as applied to Muslim-majority countries, an even greater majority, 65%, indicated those restrictions should not be extended to all visa applicants. This result helps to scratch the surface of a significant trend: racialization situates Arab Muslims/Middle Easterners as an inferior social group, deserving of discriminatory policies. When compared with the results from question #8, these results illustrate that Americans are somewhat willing to have the liberties of Muslims and Arabs infringed upon, but they would not support the same infringement upon the rights of other populations.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Throughout the 2016 elections, plenty of pundits and analysts on television, even scholars, were saying that now President Trump was only utilizing Islamophobic rhetoric to win the race, and that once he was actually in office he would do away with that intense rhetoric. The past three years have proven otherwise. What many thought was mere rhetoric to mobilize voters quickly evolved — or devolved — into Islamophobic and anti-Middle Eastern policy throughout his presidency.

In October 2018, amid the humanitarian emergency swelling on the U.S.-Mexico border, a caravan of Central American migrants fled the endemic violence and began walking toward refuge and safety in the United States. Without offering any evidence, President Trump tweeted about the asylum-seekers:

“Sadly, it looks like Mexico’s Police and Military are unable to stop the Caravan heading to the Southern Border of the United States. Criminals and unknown Middle Easterners are mixed in. I have alerted Border Patrol and Military that this is a National Emergency [sic]. Must change laws!”<sup>1</sup>

The tweet, debunked as baseless even by Trump’s own administration, alarmed advocacy groups with its blatantly xenophobic and anti-immigrant nature. Of the more than 300,000 people apprehended at the southern border last year, 61, or 0.02 percent,

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Trump, Twitter post, October 22, 2018, 5:37 a.m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1054351078328885248>.

were from countries the State Department deems the Middle East. When CBS news pushed the president to substantiate his claim, he repeated:

“You're going to find MS-13, you're going to find Middle Eastern, you're going to find everything. And guess what, we're not allowing them in our country. We want safety, we want safety.”

Again, without detail, the President simply avowed the presence of Middle Easterners amid the caravan. Without needing to explain why such people pose a national security threat, Trump successfully elicited nationally-ingrained fears about Middle Easterners. The President never mentioned ISIS or even the word “terrorism,” yet even his critics, who sought to discredit his fear-mongering tactics, cited the White House’s recent counterterrorism policy paper. Several news outlets emphatically stated, “Nowhere [in the report] was the threat of terrorists infiltrating the southern border raised.”<sup>1</sup> Trump’s islamophobic dog whistle worked. Across the political spectrum, Americans connected the dots: Middle Easterners are terrorists.

This is one of countless subtle instances in which the racialized notion of the Middle Eastern terrorist is repeated, solidified, and ingrained in the American psyche. In this paper, I have sought to demonstrate that racialization of Arab Americans is not static; it is produced, reproduced, and fortified. Further, these pervasive, racialized notions of Arab Americans have shaped American Islamophobic rhetoric and narratives.

This awareness pushed the conversation forward. Acknowledging the connection between racism and Islamophobia defies the idea that Islamophobia is a problem of

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Qiu, “Trump’s Evidence-Free Claims About the Migrant Caravan,” *New York Times*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/22/us/politics/migrant-caravan-fact-check.html>



individual bias. Rather, this connection challenges the belief that simply knowing more about Islam will lead to a decrease in Islamophobia. Islamophobia is a much more formidable challenge than personal bias, naivete, or prejudice. It is a consequence of the U.S. racial order and the Western hegemony decades in the making.

When we think about the March 2019 attack on two mosques in New Zealand, which killed at least 49 people, it is salient to remember just how widespread and acceptable the hatred of Muslims is in Western society. Islamophobia is everywhere. It cuts across party lines and political ideologies. It is a mainstream form of racism for which there are few consequences.

The mainstream acceptance of anti-Muslim bigotry without consequence represents a grotesque and dangerous double standard. Muslims and Arabs can still be slandered with impunity in America. Anti-Muslim bigots must be held to the same standard that society holds other bigots. As long as there is relative societal and legal impunity for anti-Muslim, anti-Arab discrimination, attacks and hate crimes will continue.

Moreover, when it comes to our political leadership, as long as Islamophobic and anti-Arab rhetoric cannot continue to be immune from punishment, that rhetoric can be weaponized into real policy impacting Muslim communities. The racial profiling, surveillance, detention, travel bans, and censoring of Arabs and Muslims in America evidence this.

One of the positive developments in the context of the current climate is that Islamophobia has become a mainstream social justice issue. It's something that Muslims,

but also non-Muslims, are discussing openly. A helpful step forward would be more formal study of Arab/Middle Eastern racism. By and large, Arab racialization is often either excluded or treated as an exception in race scholarship. In pedagogy, Arabs have been excluded from race and ethnic studies and, when mentioned, are often treated differently from other groups. Consider the following quote from a race and ethnic studies textbook, which implies that, unlike other groups, Arabs are responsible for their own stereotyping:

“Perhaps more serious [than discrimination faced by Muslim women] is the persistence of negative stereotyping that has plagued Middle Easterners in the United States. The activities of Arab terrorists in the Middle East and elsewhere have created a sinister image of Arab and other Middle Eastern groups—an image that was greatly exacerbated by the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001.”<sup>2</sup>

It is the responsibility of race scholars to create new ways to talk about newer racial relationships in the United States. Until they do, this anti-Muslim discrimination, as well as other forms of racism, will be dismissed and ignored and Islamophobia will be normalized.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations* (Belmont, CA, 2003): 165.

## APPENDIX



Your age:

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-57
- ☐ 58+

Your gender:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other

Your education completed:

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ 2 year degree
- ☐ 4 year degree
- ☐ Professional degree
- ☐ Doctorate

Thinking politically and socially, how would you describe your own general outlook?

- ☐ Very conservative
- ☐ Moderately conservative
- ☐ Middle of the road
- ☐ Moderately liberal
- ☐ Very liberal

How do you identify religiously, if at all?

In your own words, what are "American values"?

In your opinion, is the United States a Christian country?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

In your own words, what are Islamic values? (i.e. values that an adherent to Islam holds)

In a few words, how would you describe a Muslim?

In your opinion, do Muslims subscribe to a belief system that clashes with American values?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Following are possible explanations for the terrorist attacks on 9/11. For each one, please indicate whether you think it is a possible explanation or not.

	Yes	No
US Intervention: It's because of US intervention in the Middle East.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extremist Beliefs: It's because of the extremist beliefs of a few terrorists.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Conflict: It's because of the conflict between Christianity and Judaism on one side and Islam on the other side.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clash of Values: It's because the US believes in democracy, freedom, and equal rights for women.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Following are possible explanations for the several terrorist attacks across Europe since 2014. For each one, please indicate whether you think it is a possible explanation or not.

	Yes	No
Extremist Beliefs: It's because of the extremist beliefs of a few terrorists.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Conflict: It's because of the conflict between Christianity and Judaism on one side and Islam on the other side.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clash of Values: It's because the West believes in democracy, freedom, and equal rights for women.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How much--if any--have the events of 9/11 and other terror attacks in the West shaken your own personal sense of safety and security?

- ☐ A great deal
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A moderate amount
- ☐ A little
- ☐ None at all

Do you support the government increasing surveillance of US citizens?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you support the US government increasing surveillance of Arabs/Muslims?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you support giving the police the right to stop and search anyone at random?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you support giving the police the right to stop and search Arabs and/or Muslims at random?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you support detaining some suspicious individuals if there is not sufficient evidence to prosecute them in court?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Do you support detaining suspicious Arabs and/or Muslims if there is not sufficient evidence to prosecute them in court?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

The U.S. Department of State outlined guidelines which say visa applicants from six predominately Muslim countries (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan and Libya) must prove a close family relationship with a US resident in order to enter the country. This is often referred to as the "Muslim Ban." Knowing this, do you support or oppose these new guidelines?

- ☐ Strongly support  
☐ Somewhat support  
☐ Somewhat oppose  
☐ Strongly oppose

Should the US Department extend these guidelines to all visa applicants?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Following are possible responses to the "Muslim Ban" issued by President Trump via Executive Order 13769. For each one, please indicate whether you think it is a valid response or not. Please just indicate yes or no.

	Yes	No
The executive order is legal and constitutional.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The executive order is illegal and unconstitutional.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The executive order is misrepresented in international media. Many do not understand what the ban is intended to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The executive order falls in line with increased regulation of foreign visitors from all countries-even "friendly" countries.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The executive order will decrease the threat of terrorism.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Yes	No
The executive order is discriminatory.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would you support a law requiring Muslim Americans to register as such with the US government?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Would you support a law requiring Muslims in the US, including US citizens, to carry a special ID?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



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