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Islamophobia and the U.S. Media

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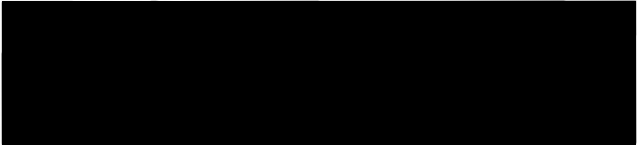
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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Michelle Maria Nichole Diamond for the Master of Science in Conflict Resolution were presented November 2, 2007, and accepted by the thesis committee and the program.

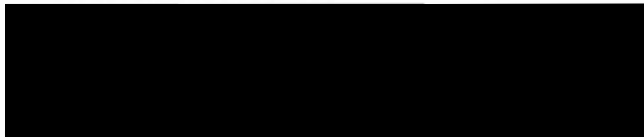
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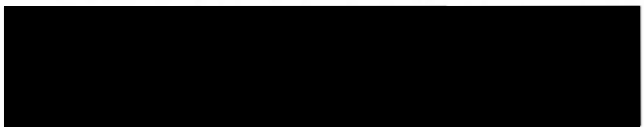


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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Michelle Maria Nichole Diamond for the Master of Science in Conflict Resolution presented November 2, 2007.

Title: Islamophobia and the U.S. Media

The following paper examines the growing fear and discrimination currently projected towards Islam and Muslims in the United States. This thesis will specifically focus on what role the U.S. mainstream media has played in either increasing or decreasing Islamophobia amongst the American public post-September 11, 2001. The research collected to conduct this study came from theories of political science, conflict resolution, international affairs, psychology, sociology and personal interviews. I conclude that Islamophobia has increased in the United States since the attacks of September 11, 2001 and that Islamophobia, due to the mainstream media, is more pervasive in the U.S. culture than initially assumed.

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND THE U.S. MEDIA

by

MICHELLE MARIA NICHOLE DIAMOND

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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I would like to dedicate the following paper to my family. Without my Dad and Mom and my two brothers, Nicholas and Jason, I would not have been able to summon the strength to complete such a great task. My family is the pillar that has kept me standing through the years and encouraged me to follow my dreams. I will be forever grateful for their endless support, faith and love.

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Islamophobia and The U.S. Media

Introduction and History of Islamophobia

The following paper examines Islamophobia in the United States as a growing phenomenon. I choose this topic because I believe it to be especially important in a post September 11, 2001 world. The strong, sweeping and often skewed representation of Muslims and Islam is often fueled by an array of mediums in the US mainstream media, which regularly fails to recognize the inherent diversity within the Islamic world and between Muslims. In a time when our country is waging a two different wars- The War on Terrorism in Afghanistan and The Iraq War in Iraq, it is more imperative then ever that Americans understand the culture, religion, politics and geography of those living in the Middle East, Muslims and the Islamic world. In order to better understand the project of Muslims and Islam in the mainstream media, the following paper will examine the role of the U.S. mainstream media in either increasing or decreasing Islamophobia amongst the American public post-September 11, 2001.

In examining the role that the mainstream media in the United States has played in either contributing to or alleviating the rise of Islamophobia in the United States post-September 11, 2001, it is important to first identify what the mainstream media is. For the purpose of this paper the U.S. mainstream media sources will include but not be limited to national newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Oregonian*, national TV channels such as ABC, CNN, and FOX as well as

national magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. I will not be analyzing coverage of Arabs, Muslims or the Islamic religion in particular news programs or specific newspapers. Rather, I have consulted the research, studies, and statistics of scholars from throughout the United States and the world and will be examining how these scholars believe that the mainstream media in the United States has either contributed to or helped alleviate the rise of Islamophobia in the United States post-September 11, 2001. This thesis will compare literature on Islamophobia with interviews conducted with young professionals between the age of 21-35, living in Portland, Oregon, and how these subjects believe that the mainstream media either influences the increase or decrease of Islamophobia in the U.S.

In examining the role of the U.S. mainstream media and the increase or decrease of Islamophobia in the United States post-September 11, 2001, it is important to understand the history of the politics and power relationships between the West and the Middle East and the Islamic world over the last two centuries. It is well documented that Western colonial aspirations in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in the Middle East triggered a great rift between the East and West, leading to a perception in Western society of the need to tame, educate, and help the underdeveloped, backward and fanatical Middle East. Edward Said, in his book, *Orientalism*, documents how Westerners, especially those inspired by the European colonial movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s, created a strong and modernized

Orientalist dialogue in the West.¹ Said argues that it was roughly in the late eighteenth century that corporate institutions first began to document and describe the Orient in detail, to teach about it, and settle on and dominate the dialogue about it.² Said describes the region of the Orient in broad terms, to encompass India, the Levant and Biblical lands, while he defines the Occident as Great Britain, France and the United States.

Before television programs and Hollywood movies focused on what it means to be, look like, dress like or live like an Arab and/or Muslim, scholars of Orientalism were writing books, journals and newspaper articles on the Ottoman Empire (which was predominantly an Islamic Empire) and how its existence lurked alongside Christendom, thus causing Christian civilization constant danger and anxiety.³ The eighteenth and early nineteenth century was an era in which Western colonialism was on the rise throughout the Middle East, South Asia and North Africa. France and Britain were colonizing Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine and in doing so Westerners convinced themselves and their governments that Western colonization of the Middle East was actually helping the Arab and Muslim world to become more intelligent, resourceful and successful. It was not uncommon, as documented by Said, for Westerners who visited the Orient to paint a picture on their return of the Middle East

¹ For the purpose of this paper, when the terms Western culture or Western society are used, they are in reference to American and European culture and society.

² Edward Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 59.

as a place “half-imagined, half-known;” in which existed “monsters, devils, heroes, terrors, pleasures and desires.”⁴ Such images were engrained into Orientalist minds, to the point that most Western scholars considered themselves experts on the culture, race, people, religion and geography of the Middle East, though most Westerners had minimal interaction and experience in the region.

Unlike Europe in the late 1890's the United States did not have a strong historical tie to the Middle East or the writings of orientalist scholars. While the United States supported the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, it really was only as recently as the early 1970s that economic and political relations between the United States and the Middle East become increasingly interdependent. This interdependence is primarily fueled by the Middle East's large oil reserve and the United States growing addiction to petroleum. Such a relationship, between the United States and the Middle East, has provided a new opportunity for modern Orientalist-inspired mainstream media to once again question how current challenges in the Middle East potentially put into question Western civilization and U.S. autonomy as we in the United States understand it today.⁵ As American foreign policy has become more immersed in the politics and socio-economic issues of the Middle East, it is not surprising that perceptions and stereotypes of Arabs and the Islamic world have become more prevalent in US mainstream media.

⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁵ For the purpose of this paper the Middle East will be defined by the following countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Yemen, Qatar and Oman.

Tim Semmerling, an independent scholar from Dallas/Fort Worth, conducted a film and media study on six American films and documentaries, which examines in great detail the characters and roles that Arabs and Muslims play in popular American film.⁶ Semmerling suggests that current stereotypes and perceptions of the Middle East in American mainstream media are a direct result of the difficult relationship between the United States and the Middle East since the 1970s. In looking at the political landscape and evolving relationship between the Middle East and the US in the last thirty-five years, it is essential to highlight the developing, volatile and often interdependent relationship between the two parties. In examining this relationship one must examine the role of the United States post-World War II and how the United States positioned herself socially, politically and economically in relation to other countries.

From the 1950s to the early 1970s, the United States adopted a very liberal economic plan, which incorporated a philosophy of liberal development, capitalism and open markets as an alternative to military power and engagement between countries and regional powers. The most significant economic reconstruction plan was the 1947 Marshall Plan, which was designed and developed by the US to rebuild Europe and Japan after World War II. Liberal economic policies drove U.S. foreign policy until the 1970s, when such policies began to clash with what is now known as

⁶ Tim Semmerling. *“Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).
The films reviewed for this study are *The Exorcist*, *Rollover*, *Black Sunday*, *Three Kings*, *Rules of Engagement*, *South park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* and CNN’s 9/11 Documentary, *America Remembers*.

the Nixon Doctrine. The Nixon Doctrine, established by President Richard Nixon in 1969, was based on the idea that America would only fund and protect countries that were friendly to American interests. Thus, the Nixon Doctrine suggested that only countries that directly served the interest of the United States would be considered U.S. allies. The Nixon Doctrine was born at the peak of the Cold War, thus its implementation was a significant change to past policies and was considered divisive, alienating and polarizing by many countries that were allied with both the United States and the Soviet Union at the time. The Nixon Doctrine was born during an era in which all Arab and Islamic countries in the Middle East refused to recognize the State of Israel, the Middle East monopoly of oil was growing stronger, and failed democratic institutions in the Middle East had resulted in strong dictatorships. All of the above occurred at the same time that secular programs in the Middle East began to crumble, resulting in the growth and failure of large nationalist movements. It was at this time in the early 1970s that many Western scholars argued that the Middle East had become a nemesis to American foreign policy.

The perception of the Arab States as the American nemesis was fueled by the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 in the historic land of Palestine. The immigration of hundreds of thousands of Jews from Europe and Russia following World War II resulted in the displacement of nearly 700,000 Palestinians from their homes and land.⁷ The displacement of the Palestine people became known as the Al-Nakba (the

⁷ Mazin Qumsiyeh, "Palestinian Refugees Right to Return and Repatriation," The Palestinian Right to Return Coalition, n.d. <www.al-awda.org> (28 September 2007).

catastrophe) all over the Arabic and Islamic world. This act alone was enough to inflame tensions between the Middle East and the West, but few at the time anticipated the backlash of the next thirty years, as war, displacement and bombings, followed the creation of the State of Israel and led to an imbalance of power, instability and distrust between the Arab world, Israel and the West. The wars that followed, between the Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab states between 1948 and 1973, greatly influenced US interest and policy in the Middle East. However, it was only in the late 1970s, with the election of Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and the administration of US president Jimmy Carter followed by that of US president Ronald Reagan, coupled with the growing power of the American religious right, that Israel became the United States' "closest ally." What many in academia refer to as "The Palestinian Question" has become one of the more contentious issues and helped contribute to Arab and Muslim hatred and mistrust of the West. For those living in the Middle East and the Islamic world, the continued expansion and empowerment of the State of Israel at the expense of the native Palestinian population became the focus of Middle Eastern and Islamic hatred of the West and specifically the United States. Extremists in the Middle East often refer to the Palestinian diaspora as an example of American hegemony in the Middle East and as proof that the United States is not an even-handed partner for peace, thus always standing by the State of Israel. In the late

1960s the empowering of Israel, coupled with the failed secular reforms of the Arab nations, led to a revival of the Islamic religion in the Middle East.⁸

It was the insecurity and instability of the social and political polices of the Middle East, that the American mainstream media often reported to the American public. Semmerling suggests that in the 1970s and 1980s Hollywood movies capitalized on the fears and frenzy that the American public was feeling towards the Middle East in regards to political relations between the East and the West. Thus it was not surprising that Hollywood movies took the lead in furthering the stereotype that Arabs and Muslims were evil and violent people. According to Semmerling and Jack Sheenen, author of *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Hollywood led the campaign of casting and portraying Middle Easterners as villains, oil sheiks, fundamentalists, etc. in cinemas across the United States. The literature of Esposito, Semmerling and Sheenen, suggests that from 1970's- September 10, 2001, the US mainstream media through mediums such the evening news, newspaper articles and Hollywood, has continuously planted a seed of fear in the American public that one day an attack could occur from someone from the Arab or Islamic world. Semmerling suggests that Islamophobia existed before September 11, 2001, in the United States, in that fear of the "evil" Arab was reinforced by events, such as but not limited to, Black September 1972, the Yom Kippur War with Israel 1973, the Oil Embargo in 1973-1974, the Iranian Revolution and Hostage Crisis 1979-1981, and the

⁸ John Esposito, *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

Gulf War in 1990.⁹ Semmerling argues that the U.S. mainstream media reported on Middle East affairs during this time as if it was the “Arab reawakening, a discourse of powerful and vicious Arab resurgence based on oil production, obscene wealth, heinous acts of surprise attacks and brutal violence.”¹⁰ Since the 1970s the American public has been continuously exposed to the foreign policy maneuvers and historic acts committed by a few in the Middle East. Thus while the majority of Arabs and/or Muslims do not fit the stereotype, the U.S. mainstream media, specifically Hollywood, often presents those in the Middle East as “brute murders, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women.”¹¹ Sheenen suggests in his book that from the 1970s to the late 1990s, the U.S. mainstream media set the stage for the American public to be continuously fearful and anxious about when an if a attack from an Arab and/or Muslim would occur against the United States.¹²

⁹ Tim Semmerling. *“Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 18-22.

¹⁰ Tim Semmerling. *“Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 16.

¹¹ Jack Sheenen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

¹² Jack Sheenen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

Literature Review

Current literature on the rise of Islamophobia is unclear, thus one is uncertain if the rise of Islamophobia is primarily a result of negative media coverage towards Arabs and/or Muslims or if other factors such as lack of education, understanding and exposure to Arabs or Muslims in schools, the workplace or in one's community also plays a major role in increasing Islamophobia. The following literature review will specifically examine the role of the U.S. mainstream media in either increasing or decreasing Islamophobia amongst the American public post-September 11, 2001.

Definition of Islamophobia

Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway, a professor of Philosophy and Islamic Studies at al-Quds University, an Arab University in Jerusalem, defines Islamophobia as the following: Violence against Muslims in the form of physical assaults, verbal abuse and the vandalizing of property (i.e. mosques, Islamic schools, cemeteries).¹³ The Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism defines Islamophobia as “the fear, hatred or hostility directed towards Islam and Muslims.”¹⁴ Amber Haque in her book *Confronting Islamophobia In Educational Practice* first defines “phobia” as an “unfounded fear or irrational fear,” thus Islamophobia “psychologically speaking, refers to an unfounded fear of Islam and its followers.”¹⁵ For the purpose of this paper,

¹³ Mustafa Abu Sway, “Islamophobia: Meaning, Manifestations, Causes,” Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, February 2006, 15.

¹⁴ “Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism” n.d.
<<http://www.fairuk.org/docs/defining%20islamophobia.pdf>> (17 July 2007).

¹⁵ Amber Haque, *Confronting Islamophobia In Educational Practice* (Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2004), 1.

Islamophobia will be defined as the hatred, fear and/or hostility towards Muslims or Islam, which is expressed in the form of violence, abuse, verbal or physical attacks and/or vandalizing of property.

While is the technical word “Islamophobia” is fairly new, the fear or Muslims and Islam is a very old concept in Western, especially European society. Professor Pandeli Glavanis in his article “ National and European Policies against Islamophobia” argues that:

“Islamophobia differs from other forms of discrimination, in that the discourse that has developed about Islam and Muslims is highly politicized in an international arena in a way that social and political discourses about other religions and peoples are not. Thus, it must be emphasized that Islamophobia can be identified as a form of discrimination that is distinct from racism, sexism, xenophobia, etc.”¹⁶

Much like anti-Semitism or homophobia is comprised of policies, views or actions that harm or discriminate against Jewish people or gay/lesbian people, Islamophobia is comprised of a system of policies, views, or actions that harm or discriminate against Muslim people.

Islamophobia Power Structures Within the U.S. Media

When examining media portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the U.S. it is important to recognize the role of power, empathy, racism, ethnocentrism, domination and sensationalism in the mainstream media. Media representation of specific topics, theories or events is often a reflection of the power structures which are set up to

¹⁶ Anna Diamantoploulou. *The Fight Against Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Bring Communities Together* (Brussels/Vienna: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia), 70.

distribute a message, in which the message has an agenda often pushed either by corporate, political or social America. The motives and agenda of the “power structure” are not always revealed to the public, nor are the long- term goals and agenda of the organization, lobby or money behind the message. Those with the greatest power (i.e. sponsors, network owners, reporters) often have the greatest underlying influence in steering, reporting and relaying the messages articulated in the mainstream media to the general public. Stuart Hall, the author of *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practice*, defines symbolic power as “the power to mark, assign and classify.”¹⁷ An example of symbolic power is when a more powerful group takes it upon themselves to represent and speak for the disempowered or less empowered group.

William Wilmot and Joyce Hocker give another definition of power specifically relating to the “power” of the media in their book *Interpersonal Conflict*. Wilmot and Hocker argue that distributive power is often exemplified in media articles as the author often presents an either/or scenario. Wilmot and Hocker use the definition of distributive power given by Leonard Dohl, in *Personality, Power, and Authority: A View From the Behavioral Sciences: Contributions in Psychology*, which states, “With force, control, pressure or aggression, one individual is able to carry

¹⁷ “British Muslims Expectation of The Government: The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation,” *Islamic Human Rights Commission* (2007), 9. Saied R. Ameli, Syed Mohammed Marandi, Sameera Ahmed, Seyfeddin Kara and Arzu Merali wrote the Islamic Human Rights Commission report.

his/her objective over the resistance of another and thus gain power.”¹⁸ This point is often best articulated by media networks throughout the United States that have an agenda, which is influenced by a theme, storyline or message, often presented to the subject/viewer in a very convincing manner, often motivated to sway a subject one way or the other on a particular topic. Distributed power was best articulated immediately after September 11, 2001, when President Bush had an ultimate goal of making the American public feel secure at home while aggressively waging the “War on Terrorism” against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Thus, President Bush’s objective of declaring a “War on Terrorism” was fueled by his motive to gain support against the “evil” terrorist and all those who supported, associated or aligned with terrorists or terrorist organizations. Such an objective was divisive and controversial with some of the American public who sought dialogue and a non-violence response to the attacks September 11, 2001. In the immediate days following September 11, 2001, President Bush masked his calls for war, power, aggression and revenge under the banner of “seeking justice” against the “terrorists” who attacked the United States.

Empathy and Islamophobia

Out of this discourse, which defines distributive power, often comes the discourse of empathy. In examining Islamophobia in the United States it is imperative that empathy is used as a guide to encourage and produce dialogue between parties. Cornel West, professor of Religion and African American Studies at Princeton

¹⁸ Joyce Hocker and William W. Wilmot, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001), 96.

University, defines empathy as the “ability to appreciate the anxieties and frustrations of the ‘other’, never to lose sight of the humanity of the marginalized no matter how wretched their condition.”¹⁹ In looking at the cause of Islamophobia in the United States and its effects on the Muslim population, empathy, along with other conflict resolution techniques, must be applied to address the way in which Muslims are portrayed by the mainstream media in the United States. Kincheloe and Steinberg argue that in addressing Islamophobia in the American education system (which includes the mainstream media) a mode of cognition, which they call cognition of empathy, must be applied, thus giving individuals the ability to address and break down modes of “racism, cultural bias, and religious intolerance” which are currently operating in the worldview of many.²⁰

An examination of power and empathy leads to the consideration of racism and how racism is either blatant or masked in the mainstream media. Daniel Christie, Richard Wagner and Deborah DuNann Winter argue in their book *Peace, Conflict and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century* that racism often occurs and is “accelerated under condition of structural inequality.”²¹ Whom the mainstream media chooses to interview when reporting on the Middle East or the Islamic world, and how

¹⁹ Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, *The Miseducation of the West: How Schools and the Media Distort Our Understanding of the Islamic World* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 2.

²⁰ Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, *The Miseducation of the West: How Schools and the Media Distort Our Understanding of the Islamic World* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 3.

²¹ Daniel Christie, Richard Wagner and Deborah DuNann Winter, *Peace, Conflict and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), 305-306.

the media frames a particular story, often influences the subject/viewer and can either create understanding and dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims or further Islamophobic feelings and/or negative perceptions towards Muslims. Stuart Hall, the author of *TV As A Medium and Its Relation to Culture*, makes a distinction between the traditional definition of racism and what Hall defines as “New Racism”. According to Hall, “New Racism” focuses on the “other” and that which is “different”. The “other” is often identified under the general reference of “they,” in which the difference in one’s culture and values is stressed to the point that the “other” is frequently inferior in the eyes of the new racist.²² Kincheloe and Steinberg contend in *The Miseducation of the West* that American educators who fail to understand the history of the relationship between the United States and the Middle East were often found engaging in generalizations such as, “‘they’ were after all the ones who attacked Us [United States]—‘they’ referencing Islam as a whole.”²³ One of the weaknesses revealed in the current literature that examines Islamophobia is an apparent failure by the mainstream media to address structural racism towards Arabs and Muslims in the United States.

“Us and We” vs. “They and Them”

When examining the increase of Islamophobia in the U.S. mainstream media post-September 11, 2001, an ethnocentric discourse, also referred to as an inherent

²²“British Muslims Expectation of The Government: The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation,” *Islamic Human Rights Commission* (2007), 9

²³ Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, *The Miseducation of the West: How Schools and the Media Distort Our Understanding of the Islamic World* (Westport: Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 4.

superiority, is also revealed by the current literature, which assesses the way that the U.S. mainstream media represents Muslims to the American public. An example of ethnocentric discourse would be when the U.S. mainstream media makes strong distinctions between the “Us” or “We” (i.e. United States or Americans) and “Them” or “They” (i.e. Muslims and/or Arabs). While such discourse is destructive for an array of reasons, most notably it suggests that “We” or “Us” are always separate and better than “They” or “Them”. The example stated above occurs often in newspaper articles and scholastic journals, which often report on Muslims as if they are a group of people who could not also identify as American, when in reality millions of Americans today identify as either Arab, Muslim and/or American.

Another discourse highlighted by Britain’s Islamic Human Rights Commission, which is relevant to the study of the U.S. mainstream media, is referred to as the “discourse of domination”. The discourse of domination is riddled with the idea of power and influence, in which “We” and “Other” are strongly defined and in which “We” is always superior to “Other”.²⁴ The “We” and “Other” is often articulated in the message which can serve a specific media agenda.

In examining the agenda of the media and how media networks decides what to report on and in what manner it is important that one consider the role of media propaganda. Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, in their book *Propaganda And Persuasion*, define propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape

²⁴ “British Muslims Expectation of The Government: The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation,” *Islamic Human Rights Commission* (2007), 12.

perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”²⁵ Propaganda can be found in the stories selected to report, in partial facts reported, in the ways in which the media reinforces a story or in the “narrow sources of experts” chosen to discuss a topic.²⁶ In examining how Islam, Arabs and Muslims have been depicted in the media, Ibrahim Aukhattala suggests that western media reinforces to the public the message that Islam is the “new enemy” in the United States, thus encouraging those in western nations to “adopt policies projecting Western domination over Islam, incites prejudices and racial discrimination against Muslim communities and minorities and promotes the clash of civilization theory”²⁷

Over the last century, who controls, funds and delivers the news to the American public has evolved from local, to national, to international broadcast agencies. Such a sweeping and powerful takeover of mainstream broadcast agencies has led to a merging of audiences, opinions and life experiences. The merging of power primarily serves to further increase influence and disempower those who are not of the dominant perspective or a member of the mainstream society, which the media serves.

²⁵ “Propaganda” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, n.d., < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda>> (14 November 2007).

²⁶ Anup, Shah. “ War, Propaganda and the Media” Global Issues (31 March 2005) <<http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp#ElementsofPropaganda>> (14 November 2007)

²⁷ Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg. *The Miseducation of the West: How Schools and the Media Distort Our Understanding of the Islamic World* (Westport: Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 153.

Not All Muslims Are Arabs; Not All Arabs Are Muslims

When the U.S. mainstream media portrays a Muslim, rarely does it portray a white man with blue eyes, a woman wearing a swimsuit or a blond, green-eyed child. Rather the U.S. mainstream media, regardless of whether it is reporting on a story or casting a part in a movie, often portrays a Muslim as an Arab with dark hair, dark eyes and a brown complexion. Such a portrayal of a Muslim is not only incomplete but it fails to acknowledge there are 1.2 billion Muslims who reside all over the world.²⁸ Of the 1.2 billion Muslims in the world only 12 percent of them identify as Arab.²⁹ Such a portrayal also marginalizes the diversity amongst the Arab population, which includes but is not exclusive to Muslims, Christians and Jews. If one were to add up all the Muslims in the Arab world the total would be about equal to the number of Muslims currently living in Indonesia.³⁰

While it is difficult to get an accurate count of the number of Muslims currently in the United States, an estimate by ReligiousTolerance.org, an organization that promotes religious tolerance and dialogue in the United States, reported that there are currently 1.8 million Muslims in the United States.³¹ While a minority of the U.S.

²⁸ “How many Muslims are in the U.S. and the rest of the world?” ReligiousTolerance.org, 2002 <http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_num.htm> (21 September 2007).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Calvin Sims. “Indonesia: Gambling That Tolerance Will Trump Fear” *New York Times*, 15 April 2007 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/15/weekinreview/15sims.htm>> 21 September 2007. The estimated number of Muslims currently living in Indonesia is 207 million.

³¹ “How many Muslims are in the U.S. and the rest of the world?” ReligiousTolerance.org, 2002 <http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_num.htm> (21 September 2007).

population practices the Islamic religion, Islam is the majority religion in many countries throughout the world, and it is projected to continue to grow rapidly. In examining Islamophobia and identifying a Muslim in the United States it is imperative to recognize that the physical appearance and ethnic background of an Arab is often the dominant paradigm in the United States. Such a premise is false in its essence and only serves to further Islamophobia in the average American.

Islamic Revival in the Twentieth Century

In an article published by Marvin Wingfield and Bushra Karaman titled “Arab Stereotypes and American Educators”, the authors argue that it is not uncommon for the mainstream media in the United States to further the stereotype that the Islamic religion as violent and intolerant.³² Such a portrayal furthers ignorance, misunderstanding and is simply not the truth. Islam, one of the three monotheistic religions in the world, is a peaceful religion, which stems from the same biblical origin of both Judaism and Christianity.³³ For centuries the Islamic religion was at the forefront of human rights, women rights, science, art, and literature.³⁴ From the seventh to the thirteenth century the Arab world was very cosmopolitan and

³² Burshra Karaman and Marvin Winfield. “ Arab Stereotypes and American Educators” American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, n.d., < <http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=283>> (November 8, 2007).

³³ “ A House Full of Light” Muslim Education and Converts Center of America, n.d. < http://www.meccacenter.com/meccacenter/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=18> (November 8, 2007).

³⁴ “ Arab Contributions to Civilization” American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, n.d. < <http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=247>> (November 8, 2007).

technologically and scientifically advanced.³⁵ However, The Crusades, the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain in the 1400s, the Reformation greatly changed the social, political and geographical framework of the Middle East and Islamic world. With each war or political defeat the Arab and/or Muslim experienced a step backwards, as the Middle East and Islamic world failed to adopt Western-influenced education, economics and political reform. This is not to suggest that Western models of industrialization and modernization were not tested, desired and adopted in many parts of the Arab and Islamic world, it is just that such technologies did not bring the desired economic and political gains. Revolutionaries such as Sayyid Qutb capitalized on failed Arab nationalism and western models of social reform, purposing an Islamic alternative, which he argued would provide “a sense of dignity, self-worth,” to those living in the Middle East and Islamic world.³⁶

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that Western models of education, science and social reform were deemed to be failed policies in the Arab and Islamic world. Secularist and nationalist reforms and movements had gained unprecedented support among those living in the Middle East post-World War II until the 1960s and 1970s, when the “dreams of economic progress, democratic rights, and political sovereignty seemed unreal and disappointing.”³⁷ It was during the 1960s and 1970s that previous writings and speeches of Sayyid Qutb, Abul Ala Mawdudi and the Ayatollah

³⁵ Ibid., 1.

³⁶ John Esposito. *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). 72.

Khomeini came alive, sparking a revival of political and conservative Islam. The revival of political Islam was “precipitated largely by a series of disappointments and frustrations over a long period of time, including the inability of prevailing political and social structures to deliver economic security and political freedom” in the Middle East and Islamic world.³⁸

The resurgence of political Islam in the late twentieth century is a response to many factors, i.e. economic stagnation, failed secularism, humiliation by the West, to name a few. Under the banner of political Islam many Muslims have articulated legitimate concerns, fears, and political and social demands of Muslims. Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, in his article “The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict,” suggests that the western mainstream media establishment has grouped together resurgent Islam with Islamic fundamentalism, thus “maintaining that the resurgence is simply due to the inherently rigid, static, retrogressive and anti-modern foundation of Islam.”³⁹ One of the underlining themes in Hossein-Zadeh is the linking of resurgent Islam with Islamic fundamentalism is not only untrue but it fails to recognize the legitimate movement within Islam, which seeks justice, respect, self-

³⁷ Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, “The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2005, 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹ Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, “The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2005, 6.

determination and political independence from both the West and Arab authoritarian regimes.⁴⁰

Mainstream Media Portrayal and Discourse of the Islamic World

John Esposito in his book *Voices of Resurgent Islam* argues that it is not the Islamic religion that has spurred distrust, unease and hatred towards Islam in the West, rather it is political events such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the oil crisis of the 1970s and Iran's Islamic Revolution which have influenced the West's perception of Islam, Muslims and the Middle East.⁴¹ In his book Esposito highlights the U.S. mainstream media coverage of the Middle East and Islamic world during the 1970s. Esposito suggests that the US media rather than reporting on the legitimate concerns of those living in the region focused primarily figures such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Muammar al-Qaddafi and on stories which concentrated on "pictures of women in traditional dress, rhetoric attacking foreign investment and Western culture, and demands to cleanse elements of modern morality".⁴² Such footage is similar to that of today, in which the mainstream media continues to highlight the most sensational stories or figures in the Middle East, thus furthering the stereotype that all Arabs and Muslims are fanatical and unable to engage in dialogue.

⁴⁰ Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, "The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2005.

⁴¹ John Esposito. *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 21.

⁴² John Esposito. *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 29.

In an online newspaper *Open Democracy*, founding editor Foud Nahdi argues “[Generally] Western news agencies are dominated by hostile, careless coverage of Islam, thus distorting reality and destroying trust amongst its [Arab and Muslim] viewers.”⁴³ Those in academia, such as Professor Pandeli M. Glavanis, who have followed the rise of Islamophobia in the West, would argue that the stigmatization and generalization of Muslims in the Western mainstream media have misled the public about the true and peaceful practices of Islam.⁴⁴ The Islamic Human Rights Commission suggests that the short sound bites employed on the evening news are the catalyst, which serve to spread hate and violence, from those who support violent Islam to those who watch the mainstream Western media.⁴⁵ Sound bites and short Internet updates or tickers often relay a very narrow and one-sided message, which is usually broadcasted to stir reaction among viewers. Thus, a shortage of substantive news stories allows little room for intellectual thought, challenge or processing and often provides an opportunity for those with the most extreme viewpoints to make the evening broadcast instead of those with more moderate perspectives. In part such extreme views are highlighted to fill the public’s craving for sensationalized news and a more entertaining report. One example of such footage would be FOX News special

⁴³ Dina Abdel-Mageed. “The British Media: Fair or Biased: The Portrayal of Muslims After the London Attacks,” *IslamOnline.net*, July 27, 2005
<<http://www.islamonline.net/English/Views/2005/07/article07.SHTML>> (17 July 2007).

⁴⁴ Anna Diamantopoulou. *The Fight Against Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Bring Communities Together* (Brussels/Vienna: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia), 72.

⁴⁵ “British Muslims Expectation of The Government: The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation,” *Islamic Human Rights Commission* (2007), 13.

called “Islam vs. Islamist”. This particular film shows “Islamists advocating, among other things, the imposition of Sharia law on Muslims in the West, the stoning of women who commit adultery, and even violence and terrorism”.⁴⁶ PBS who was slated to originally broadcast “Islam vs. Islamist” argued that the film is “alarmist” and “overreaching”, thus cancelled and refused to air the show.⁴⁷

Anna Diamantoploulou in her report “ The Fight Against Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Bringing Communities Together” argues that through an array of media outlets, Westerners, have internalized and accepted the stereotype that all Muslims are evil terrorists, thus collectively denigrating the personality and integrity of Muslims everywhere.⁴⁸ Ismael Hossein-Zadeh argues that mainstream media in the United States:

By focusing almost exclusively on the violent behavior of the frustrated and embattled Muslims, the corporate media and the establishment political pundits in the United States tend to create the impression that the rise of religious fundamentalism is a purely Islamic phenomenon.⁴⁹

To the extent that the mainstream media is suggesting to the public that Islam is the only religion affected or at times driven by fundamental polices or fundamentalists, is to consciously fail to acknowledge the role of Christianity,

⁴⁶ “FOX To Air Controversial Documentary on Islam” [FOXNews.com](http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,303381,00.html), October 18, 2007, <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,303381,00.html>> (November 8, 2007).

⁴⁷ “FOX To Air Controversial Documentary on Islam” [FOXNews.com](http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,303381,00.html), October 18, 2007, <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,303381,00.html>> (November 8, 2007).

⁴⁸ Anna Diamantoploulou. *The Fight Against Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Bring Communities Together* (Brussels/Vienna: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia).

⁴⁹ Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, “The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2005, 6.

Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, and how these religions at times have all incorporated acts of violence and terror.

The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) is a British publication, which has documented extensively the role that the Western media, and specifically the British media, plays in presenting the Islamic religion, Arabs and Muslims to a Western public. In 2007, the IHRC published a report, *The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation*. The IHRC argues that the presentation of cultural and social issues concerning Muslims given by the mainstream media is not always deliberately hostile, but nevertheless either intentionally or by default encourages a negative perception of Muslims to the general public.⁵⁰ Such presentations, it is argued, frequently lead to negative experiences for Muslims both at the individual and collective level.⁵¹ The four main questions examined in the 2007 Islamic Human Rights Commission report are as follows:

1. How has the Western media generally covered Islam and Muslims?
2. What are the prevailing discourses about Islam and Muslims that can be identified in selected forms of media?
3. What are the concerns about media reporting and why does representation matter?
4. What action can Muslims expect the government to take to remedy any unfairness?⁵²

⁵⁰ “British Muslims Expectation of The Government: The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation,” *Islamic Human Rights Commission* (2007) 7

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

Based on the literature, I would argue that the above questions are an accurate reflection of the increasing discourse on Islamophobia currently taking place primarily in the European Union and in some pockets of the United States. Such discourse is a direct response to the rapid increase of Islamophobic literature, social policies and laws in both in the United States and Europe.

Islam and The Clash Of Civilizations

Prior to September 11, 2001, one of the most well-known articles written about the future political, social and economic role of the Middle East and specifically the Islamic world, was that published by Samuel P. Huntington in the summer of 1993: “The Clash Of Civilizations”. In “The Clash Of Civilizations,” Huntington argues that in the future, nation states will continue to remain powerful in world politics, but global politics will fundamentally shift from the power and politics between nations to the power and politics between groups of different cultures.⁵³ With this new theory, Huntington argued that the geopolitical landscape worldwide would transform into what he describes as “The Clash of Civilizations”. According to Huntington, the clash of civilizations will alter relationships between nations, so that alliances will no longer focus exclusively on economic and political policies, but rather new alliances will be built on the cultural identity of those that are from similar “villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups and shared cultural heterogeneity.”⁵⁴ Huntington’s article goes on to suggest that since Western culture exclusively values

⁵³ Samuel P. Huntington. “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs Journal* (1993), 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

“individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, etc.” and Islamic culture does not, the two cultures are not compatible and therefore will continuously clash, both politically, socially and militarily, in the near future.⁵⁵ Huntington argues that the West must go on the defense because the Islamic culture (i.e. the “other”) is against Western interests and is not compatible with Western political or social objectives. Some argue that Huntington’s theory became a self-fulfilling prophecy after September 11, 2001, thus providing an opportunity for the Bush Administration to blame exclusively Islamic militants for the attacks of September 11, 2001, rather than look at the underlying geo-political policies of the United States and the West historically towards the Middle East and the Islamic world. Parvez Ahmed, the chairman of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, argues that Huntington’s article “makes a fatalistic misassumption that the West and Islam are monolithic and culturally exclusive.”⁵⁶ Mathew Price, in his article “The Re-Clash of Civilization” argues that “few formulations have sparked more controversy than Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis.”⁵⁷ Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, in their book, *The Miseducation Of The West: How Schools and the Media*

⁵⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁶ Parvez Ahmed, “Attacking Islam: Implications for Social Cohesion and U.S. Relations with the Muslim World” Parvez Ahmed Personal Blog, 17, July 2007.
<<http://drparvezahmed.blogspot.com/2007/07/attacking-islam-implications-for-social.html>> (20 July 2007)

⁵⁷ Mathew Price. “The Re-Clash of Civilizations” *Boston Globe*, (February 15, 2004)
<http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/02/15/re_clash_of_civilizations/> (November 8, 2007).

Distort Our Understanding of the Islamic World, assert that Huntington's article "overly homogenize[s] both Islam and the West as well as the other civilizations that he picks."⁵⁸ Edward Said, in his article "The Clash of Ignorance" writes:

"Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make "civilizations" and "identities" into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing."⁵⁹

Unlike Huntington, Said argues that Islam is historically compatible with other religions and cultures, thus Huntington's argument fails to acknowledge interconnectivity between the East and the West and specifically the historical role that Islam has played in shaping Western literature, arts, politics, science and history.⁶⁰

Islamophobia Denier

While it is difficult to compare actual statistics measuring an increase or decrease of Islamophobia amongst Americans pre- and post-September 11, 2001, one of the larger challenges in addressing Islamophobia is to counter attacks by Islamophobia deniers, i.e. those who do not believe that Islamophobia exists. Like Huntington, scholar Daniel Pipes strongly supports the premise of "The Clash of Civilizations." Pipes, an outspoken denier of

⁵⁸ Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, *The Miseducation of the West: How Schools and the Media Distort Our Understanding of the Islamic World* (Westport Connecticut: Praeger, 2004) 27.

⁵⁹ Edward Said. "The Clash of Ignorance" *The Nation*. (October 4, 2001) <<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20011022/said>> (November 8, 2007)

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Islamophobia questions in his article in the *New York Sun* called “Islamophobia?” what “exactly constitutes an ‘undue fear of Islam’ when Muslims acting in the name of Islam today make up the premier source of worldwide aggression.”⁶¹ Pipes’s accusation suggests that fear of Muslims is not only proper and warranted, but that it should be expected because Islam is an inherently violent religion

Islam Distorted

Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, critics of both Huntington and Pipes, argue that the West has greatly distorted Islam, Islamic history and the contributions of Arabic and Islamic culture, language and traditions, which have vastly influenced the West. Kincheloe and Steinberg suggest that in order to further and strengthen the case for the “War on Terrorism,” the American right-wing narrative argues that “the United States has played a passive, innocent, and benevolent role in the Muslim world and then without warning was hit with an inexplicable attack.”⁶² The U.S. mainstream media since September 11, 2001 and particularly before the current war in Iraq, was committed to such a narrative. Thus, the mainstream media often failed to recognize the role that the United States, politically and socially, played in creating and shaping the Middle East and the Islamic world since the 1970s. Jeff Cohen, in his article “Bush and Iraq: Mass Media, Mass Ignorance” suggests that without critical thinking and/or

⁶¹ Daniel Pipes, “Islamophobia?” *New York Sun*, 25 October 2005, <<http://www.danielpipes.org/article/3075>> (29 July 2007).

⁶² Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg. *The Miseducation of the West: How schools and the Media Distort our Understanding of the Islamic World* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 8.

debates by the mainstream media, currently and specifically before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, it is impossible for the American public to make sense of or to fully understand the impact of September 11, 2001 from a geopolitical, social, and cultural perspective.⁶³

Hollywood and Islamophobia

*Oh, I come from a land
From a faraway place
Where the caravan camels roam,
Where they cut off your ear
If they don't like your face.
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.*⁶⁴

The above stanza is an example of a verse adopted in the opening song of the Disney movie *Aladdin*. This verse is an example of how an audience primarily comprised of children is exposed to indirect racism and hate speech towards those of Arab and/or Muslim identity. Such rhetoric is an example of how the mainstream media infiltrates all age groups and furthers a hostile perspective, which often validates the harbored feelings of those of the American public who consciously or subconsciously fear Arabs, Muslims and ultimately the entire Middle East. Jack Sheenen, the author of *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, attributes the spread of Islamophobia to the demonization discourse against Arabs and Muslims, which is pervasive in Hollywood movies and other media modes. The demonization

⁶³ Jeff Cohen. "Bush and Iraq: Mass Media, Mass Ignorance" [CommonDreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org) (December 1, 2003) <<http://www.commondreams.org/views03/1201-13.htm>> (November 8, 2007).

⁶⁴ "Aladdin- Arabian Nights" [YouTube](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEGlJP4X4vc), n.d. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEGlJP4X4vc>> (November 8, 2007) The song was produced for the Disney movie *Aladdin*.

discourse is centered on “malicious dishonesty, hypocrisy and fantasy” of Arabs and Muslims and their intentions and role in American society, politics and the world.⁶⁵ Sheenen, who has written the most extensive book on the depiction of Arabs in Hollywood movies and in the mainstream media in general, argues that in almost all of Hollywood’s movies which depict Arabs, the Arabs are almost always one of the following: “brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits and/or abusers of women.”⁶⁶ Tim Semmerling, in *“Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear*, highlights how each film portrays the Arab character as “evil” and the Western character as moral, trustworthy, strong and resilient. Semmerling asks the reader to “reconsider the ‘evil’ Arab and think about the ways in which the Arabs are devised to produce fear” in today’s [U.S] media, specifically film.⁶⁷ Semmerling connects the cinematic role of Arabs as mean, rich, dirty, oil-hording, and violent with the post-September 11, 2001, stereotype of violent, mean, bitter, Western-hating Arabs. One of the weaknesses in Semmerling’s book is that he fails to highlight any movie that positively reflects Arabs and/or Muslims; thus he is unable to clearly highlight his criteria for what qualifies as a pro- and/or anti-Arab/Muslim movie. Semmerling also makes a lot of broad generalizations, which lead the reader to feel

⁶⁵ “British Muslims Expectation of The Government: The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation,” *Islamic Human Rights Commission* (2007), 12.

⁶⁶ Jack Sheenen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 2.

⁶⁷ Tim Semmerling. *“Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* (Austin: University of Texas Press. 2006), 2

that at times he is stretching to interpret a specific event or phrase as Islamophobic, when it may or may not have been such. Unlike Sheenen's book, which also focuses specifically on Hollywood films and its portrayal of Arabs and Muslims, Semmeringly only looks at six movies, so his findings are based on a very small and specific group of featured films.

The Struggle Within Islam

In order to understand Islamophobia it is important to understand the challenges that currently face Muslims within their own community. The failure of the western media to report internal challenges within the Islamic religion furthers Islamophobia as it leaves the impression that Muslims are not confronting or acknowledging the more fundamental practices and/or wings of their religion. In looking at the events from the perspective of the Muslim world, Akbar Ahmed, chair of Islamic Studies at American University in Washington D.C., in his book *Islam Under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World*, suggests that the Islamic world has seen a slow yet continued deterioration and breakdown within its own society. Ahmed attributes the deterioration and breakdown of Muslim society in the latter half of the twentieth century to what he calls "*Asabiyya*". Ahmed defines *Asabiyya* as "group loyalty, cohesion or solidarity."⁶⁸ Ahmed argues that when Islam is interpreted as suggested by the Prophet Mohammed, Islamic societies are just, honest and honorable. In examining the rise of Western colonialism, Arab dictatorship, failed nationalism and globalization in the nineteenth and twentieth

⁶⁸ Ahmed, S. Akbar, *Islam Under Siege* (United Kingdom: Polity, 2003), 14.

centuries, Ahmed believes that such practices have led to the breakdown of *Asabiyya*, thus corrupting, polluting and ultimately causing strife between Muslim communities and the West. Specifically, Ahmed addresses how the West has failed to recognize the role of “honor” in traditional Islamic societies, thus failing to understand how honor dictates the practices, opinions, values and lifestyle of those who have traditionally lived in an Islamic society. One of Ahmed’s main points is that the Islamic world is currently struggling between what he calls the “honor” and “post- honor” society, the honor society being traditional Islamic societies and post-honor societies being the West. Ahmed goes on to state that post-honor societies are galvanized by globalization, thus traditional Islamic honor societies feel that they are under siege by modern capitalism, urbanization and globalization instigated by the West. Thus, while the Western media portrays the Islamic world as backwards, tribal and traditional, facets of the Islamic world are trying to preserve such practices, as they are deemed traditional, honorable and essential to living under Islamic law.

Ahmed does not suggest that the breakdown of honor and traditional practices is an excuse or justification for violence against the West or between Muslims themselves, but rather that such a breakdown has led to a rift within Muslim society, specifically between those who live by more secular and modern views and those who yearn for the former years of traditional practices of the Islamic faith. Ahmed goes on to suggest that the rise of globalization and capitalism in the West has directly affected what is perceived by Muslims as the traditional honor code conduct in Islamic society,

thus giving rise to a hyper-*asbiyya* culture. Ahmed argues that the hyper-*asbiyya* culture often leaves Muslims feeling vengeful and bitter, and sometimes promotes violence between Muslims or between Muslims and non-Muslims.⁶⁹

In reflecting on how the Islamic world is attempting to find itself in the haze of rapid modernity, Ahmed argues that Western governments and particularly the mainstream media need to take an opportunity to listen to what the modern Islamic voices are saying and build relationships between the moderate powers of the East and West. In reopening the lines of communication, Ahmed proposes that an opportunity to rebuild the Islamic world's sense of dignity and honor, and thus its overall relationship with the West, is greatly increased through positive and productive dialogue with governments and in the [western] media.⁷⁰ An alliance between East and West moderates could lead to increased understanding, security and a break down of Islamophobia in the West.

Ahmed is diligent in recognizing that while religion plays a dynamic role in shaping the Islamic world today, other very important factors such as political, economic, social and anthropological issues also greatly influence how honor societies conduct themselves in a post-honor world. Like Ahmed, scholar John Esposito suggests that "there is a [current] struggle within the Muslim world over whether Islam should change or remain the same, specifically whether it should go through

⁶⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 158.

processes such as reformation, restoration or reinterpretation.”⁷¹ Esposito and Ahmed both believe that the Islamic religion in many ways is at a historic fork in the road where monumental change in interpretation and practice is possible. In reviewing Ahmed’s book, Ahmad Faruqi, a fellow of the American Institute of International Studies, suggests that while Ahmed does an outstanding job of highlighting the challenges facing Muslims from a Muslim perspective, he fails to disclose the harm inflicted on the Islamic world by the West during the last two centuries and how that has greatly shaped the way Muslims perceive and interpret the West as well as how the media reports and interprets the Islamic world. If the Western media fails to report past offenses that have been inflicted by the West on the Islamic world, it is impossible to make sense of why the Islamic world would feel angry, betrayed by or disillusioned with the West. In his book, Ahmed fails to look in great detail at the role of the Western media and how the media has helped to bridge and/or divide the relationship between honor and post-honor societies, which he claims is one of the main underlying issues plaguing the Islamic world’s relationship with the rest of the world.

Historical Events Leading to an Increase of Islamophobia in the United States

In examining significant historical events that led to a specific increase or decrease of Islamophobic-inspired attacks against Arab and Muslims by Americans

⁷¹ Albert Chiou. “New Islamic Studies Program Inaugurated,” *Stanford Daily*, 18 November 2003, <<http://daily.stanford.edu/article/2003/11/18/newIslamicStudiesProgramInaugurated>> (17 September 2007)

prior to the 2001 attack, it is important to highlight both the first Gulf War in 1990 and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Both the war and the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building resulted in an immediate increase of harassment and/or violent attacks committed against Arab or Muslim Americans living in the United States. During the first forty-eight hours following the Oklahoma bombing, reporters, newspapers and radio stations throughout the United States were openly speculating that someone of Middle Eastern descent must have committed such a terrorist attack. Two hundred anti-Muslim incidents had been reported to The Council on Islamic Relations before it was revealed to the public that Timothy McVeigh, an American citizen of Caucasian background, and veteran of the first Gulf War, was responsible for the bombing in Oklahoma City.⁷²

While such specific events during the 1990s triggered moments of increased discrimination against Arab and Muslim Americans, no event had such an immediate, prolonged and detrimental effect as that of the hijackings of four American airliners on September 11, 2001. Reports issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Human Rights groups- such as Human Rights Watch and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, illustrate that the recent increase of Islamophobia in the United States is directly related to the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) which is an independent, nongovernmental organization, reported in November 2002, in *We Are Not The Enemy: Hate Crimes Against Arabs*,

⁷² “We are not the Enemy: Hate Crimes Against Arabs, Muslims and Those Perceived to be Arab or Muslim after September 11, 2001.” Human Rights Watch, 14 no. 6. (2002), 13.

Muslims And Those Perceived To Be Arab Or Muslims After September 11, that hate crimes reported by the FBI against Muslims living in the United States post-September 11, 2001 rose from 28 in 2000 to 481 in 2001.⁷³ The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee reported over six hundred attacks since September 11, 2001, related to hate crimes either against Arabs, Muslims or those perceived to be either of the above.⁷⁴ The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported that civil rights complaints to CAIR rose from 1,522 in 2004 to 1,972 in 2005 and 2,467 in 2006.⁷⁵ In addition, specific Anti-Muslim hate crime complaints increased from 141 in 2004, to 153 in 2005 and 167 in 2006.⁷⁶

Results of a survey conducted by the Media and Society Research Group at Cornell University in December 2004, indicated that 44 percent of Americans believe

⁷³ “We Are Not The Enemy: Hate Crimes Against Arabs, Muslims And Those Perceived To Be Arab Or Muslims After September 11, 2001,” Human Rights Watch, November 2002. <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/usahate/>> 18 July 2007.

⁷⁴ “ADC Fact Sheet: the Condition of Arab American post-September 11,” American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 27 March 2002. <[http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=282&no_cache=1&sword_list\[\]=fact&sword_list\[\]=sheet](http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=282&no_cache=1&sword_list[]=fact&sword_list[]=sheet)> (18 July 2002). The report states that those perceived as Muslims or Arabs included but were not exclusive to Sikhs, South Asians and Latinos.

⁷⁵ “The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States 2007,” The Council on American-Islamic Relations. n.d.. <<http://sun.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/2007-Civil-Rights-Report.pdf>> (17 September 2007) p.8. CAIR categorizes a “Civil Rights” complaint as one that stems from the perceived ethnicity or religion of the person being discriminated against.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.9.

that the United States government should curtail the civil rights of American Muslims in some manner.⁷⁷ The report continued:

About 27 percent of respondents said that all Muslim Americans should be required to register their location with the federal government, and 26 percent said they think that mosques should be closely monitored by U.S. law enforcement agencies. About 22 percent said the federal government should profile citizens as potential threats based on the fact that they are Muslim or have Middle Eastern heritage. In all, about 44 percent said they believe that some curtailment of civil liberties is necessary for Muslim Americans.⁷⁸

The results of this survey are aligned with a previous study conducted by the Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which conducted a phone survey of one thousand Americans living in the continental United States, in an attempt to gain a better idea of what the average American feels and believes about Islam. The poll results included the following findings:

- More than one-fourth of survey respondents agreed with stereotypes such as “Muslims teach their children to hate” and “Muslims value life less than other people.”
- When asked what comes to mind when they hear “Muslim,” 32 percent of respondents made negative comments. Only 2 percent had a positive response.
- Those with the most negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims tend to be less-educated white males who are politically conservative.
- General knowledge of Islam is low but the presence of Muslim friends and colleagues drives more enlightened attitudes.
- African-Americans hold more favorable attitudes about Muslims than do whites.
- While half of respondents believed that American Muslims are

⁷⁷ “Fear factor: 44 percent of Americans queried in Cornell national poll favor curtailing some liberties for Muslim Americans,” *The Cornell News*, December 17, 2004
<<http://www.news.cornell.edu/releases/Dec04/Muslim.Poll.bpf.html>> (1 August 2007)

⁷⁸ Ibid.

“cooperating” in the war on terror, 50 percent did not believe that they are actively “condemning” terrorist acts.

- Most Americans believe that the terrorists are misusing the teachings of Islam. □
- About half of Americans hold one or more favorable attitudes about Muslims, such as “Muslims have family-oriented values” and “Muslims have contributed to civilization.” □
- Those who believe they are knowledgeable about Islam tend to have more positive attitudes.⁷⁹

A similar report conducted in Europe titled, “Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All,” produced in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust. This report specifically focuses on populations in the UK and Europe, thus highlighting eight components, which motivate and expound Islamophobia in European Society. The eight components are:

1. Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change
2. Islam is seen as separate and ‘other’. It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them.
3. Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist.
4. Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a ‘clash of civilizations’.
5. Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage.
6. Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand.
7. Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.
8. Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural and normal.

According to the Runnymede Trust report, the eight components listed above are what continue to fuel the increase of Islamophobia in specifically Europe, but also across the world.

⁷⁹ “Poll: 1-in-4 Americans Holds Anti-Muslim Views,” Council on American-Islamic Relations, October 4, 2004, <<http://www.cair.com/default.asp?Page=articleView&id=1248&theType=NR>> (4 October 2004)

In addition to the Runnymede Trust report is a report by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee which reported in “Impact of September 11 on Traditional Openness to Immigrants and Non-Immigrants: An Arab-American Community Perspective,” that between September 11, 2001 and November 2001 the State Department reported that over 1,200 people [Arabs and/or Muslims] had been detained for alleged connection with terrorism..⁸⁰ It is believed by many civil and human rights groups that as many as two thousand people could have been held without proper access to the U.S. legal system or friends and family.⁸¹

One can conclude from reviewing the literature review and accumulated statistics that while some mainstream media news programs and organizations have tried to combat Islamophobia in the United States since September 11, 2001, Islamophobia continues to increase among the American public through the reporting of foreign and domestic affairs as well as through channels of policy making. What the literature reveals is that few documents have been published on how to exactly address, identify and combat Islamophobia in the mainstream media, and few networks have specific policies to address Islamophobia. In an attempt to answer the question of whether or not the mainstream media helps to increase or decrease Islamophobia in a post- September 11, 2001 world, this paper will compare the responses of those interviewed to the literature review to see if those interviewed

⁸⁰ Carol Khawly. “Impact of September 11 on Traditional Openness to Immigrants and Non-Immigrants: An Arab-American Community Perspective,” 14 May 2003
<<http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=1815>> 20 July 2007.

⁸¹ Ibid.

believe that the mainstream media in the United States is one of the leaders in spreading Islamophobia.

In researching the increase or decrease of Islamophobia in the mainstream media, this thesis relies primarily on academic books written post-September 11, 2001, government polls and reports and on journals and published media articles. Most of the theories applied to this paper were found in academic books and media articles, journals and commission reports. No supplementary literature is used directly from movies or radio station reports. References to movies or radio are quoted from a published journal report or media article.

Methodology

I chose to write a thesis that included traditional scholarly research coupled with personal one-on-one interviews. The reason I have chosen to compliment my research with personal interviews is that I feel that while many previous scholars and commissions have engaged in extensive documentation of the history and rise of Islamophobia, as well as the influence of the mainstream media on Islamophobia, few scholars have studied small sub-communities in the United States and specifically non-Muslim communities post-September 11, 2001. The data collected in this paper is unique in that its interview criteria is very specific; it examines American citizens who identify as non-Muslim, are between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five, were living in the United States on September 11, 2001, and who now currently live in Portland, Oregon.

I chose this specific interview criterion because I felt that it was important to focus on the perspective of those who lived in the United States on September 11, 2001, and their perceptions of Muslims and the Islamic religion today. While I do not dispute that it was hard for Americans living abroad at the time, nothing can compare to the shock and astonishment, followed by grave fear, in the United States, the first couple of days following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Feelings of confusion and shock were so prevalent throughout the country, especially in the mainstream media coverage, that fear of an additional attack on the United States by Muslim “fanatics” was pervasive.

I chose to conduct my interviews in Portland, Oregon, for a number of reasons. First and foremost I currently live in Portland, Oregon, thus my access and knowledge of the local population is extensive and well refined after two decades of residency. In choosing Portland I was very interested in interviewing a specific demographic. Please see below for demographic details:

Young Professional:

Young person between the age of 21-35 who works and/or interns in a professional environment. This person may or may not get paid for their services, but they do work more than 30hours per week.

Education Level

Each subject interviewed has obtained a bachelors degree from a four year credited college. Four the of subjects have a Masters degree or MBA.

Profession

The following is a list the current employment of those interviewed.

- *Fireman
- * Finance Manager- Intel
- * General Architect
- * Real Estate Broker
- * Real Estate Business Owner
- * Hartford Insurance-Whole Sale Broker
- * Business Student- Portland State University (PSU)
- * Construction Management Masters Degree at Standford University.
- * Office Manager
- * Business Owner
- * Design Architect
- * Bookstore Employee
- * Insurance Account Manager

At the moment it is believed that Portland, Oregon is home to approximately 6,000 to 10,000 Muslims with approximately eleven mosques or Islamic centers in the greater Portland area.⁸² One of the challenges to interviewing people living in Portland,

⁸² Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri, "A Community of Cultures" Reed College, n.d.
<http://web.reed.edu/apply/student_life/faculty_research.html> (12 November 2007).

Oregon, is that the city identifies on the far left of the political and social spectrum, thus, the perspective of those living in a city of similar size in another area of the country most likely would be very different than the perspective of those living in Portland, Oregon. Another challenge to interviewing people in Portland was that while I was able to find people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, I was unable to connect with people from a range of racial or religious backgrounds. Thus, most of my interview subjects were young professionals who identified as at least one of the following: Caucasian, middle class, college educated and/or West Coast native.

In assessing whether or not young professionals living in Portland, Oregon, believe that the U.S. mainstream media has played a role in either contributing to or alleviating Islamophobia in the United States post-September 11, 2001, I decided to conduct interviews of thirteen young professionals between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five. The median age of those interviewed was twenty-seven. When conducting the research I was primarily interested in young educated individuals and their perception of the role of the U.S. mainstream media and its influence on America's portrayal and interpretation of the culture of Arabs and Muslims as well as the Islamic religion.

Each subject was interviewed in private and eleven of the thirteen interviews were tape recorder. In total each interviewee answered twenty-eight questions. The interview questions ranged from general background questions on Islam, the Arab World and the Middle East to questions on the U.S. mainstream media, Hollywood and newspaper and Internet reporting. The last section of the interview consisted of

four questions, which asked the interviewee to identify how they would feel in specific situations with an identified Muslim. All interviews were conducted in full, and the average interview took between thirty and forty-five minutes. I chose to conduct my interview with each individual in private because I thought it would provide a safe and trustworthy environment for the subject to share his/her personal beliefs, opinions and experiences. I also set up my questions in a way that gradually steered the subject from general to personal questions.

While some documentation of the mainstream media's role in spreading Islamophobia through television broadcasts and newspaper reports exists, I found very few specific studies examining a single media station or newspaper and its coverage of Muslims and the Islamic religion over a specific period of time. Thus, most of the current research focused on tracking the increase or decrease of Islamophobia is an accumulation of broad research, which examines Muslim communities and large poll-conducted research. It was this challenge and lack of specific research that led me to conduct personal interviews. Very few studies have been published on specific socio-economic, racial or geographical population groups in the United States and how these groups perceive or identify Muslims. Current research on Islamophobia in the United States is primarily an accumulation of reports from Muslims, Arabs or those who are perceived as Middle Eastern about how they have become victims of Islamophobia. In the past decade little research has been conducted which specifically focuses on American citizens who are non-Muslim and their fears, hesitations, understanding and misunderstanding of Muslims, Islam and the Middle East. However, this is not the

case in the European Union, where extensive research has been conducted on the rise of Islamophobia and the role played in this by European media and non-Muslims.

Interviews

Once the interviews were conducted, results were very mixed and insightful. Of the thirteen people who volunteered to be interviewed not one of them had a Muslim relative. Only two of the thirteen people had friends who identified as Muslim and only four of the thirteen interviewed had ever studied Islam either on their own or in a formal academic setting.⁸³ When asked if the subject knew the name of the Muslim religion, seven of the thirteen respondents said the name of the Muslim religion was Islam, one subject said “Islamic” and five subjects said “no,” they did not know the name of the Muslim religion. When asked if the subject could explain the difference between a Muslim and an Arab, three people had no idea what the difference was, while the other ten answers ranged from “Muslims being a part of a religious group” to Arab being an “ethnicity and background of a person”. Two subjects knew that those who identify as an Arab could be either a Muslim or a Christian. All other respondents did not realize that Christians live in the Arab world and identify as Arab. One woman who does not have any Arab or Muslim friends suggested that an Arab is someone from a particular religion, or a person who lives outside of an Islamic state. Another male subject said that thought an Arab is someone directly from Saudi Arabia.

⁸³ One subject took a course in college titled Women and Islam. All other subjects studied Islam either on the Internet or through extracurricular readings.

Of the four respondents that had previously studied Islam, three accurately identified the difference between an Arab and a Muslim.⁸⁴ The other ten subjects were either able to define just a Muslim, were unable to identify any specifics about a Muslim or Arab, did not know there was a difference or defined an Arab in a very narrow or incorrect way. Two respondents said that Muslims are people who believe in Allah and the Prophet Mohammad.

When asked if the subject thought that a Muslim person looks a certain way, six of the thirteen subjects said “yes,” Muslims have a specific look. When asked to expand their statements, most respondents identified Muslims as having “dark skin, hair and eyes”. One subject who works at Intel said he is able to identify Muslims because they tend to dress more conservatively than religious Jewish and Christian employees”. When asked about how Muslim men and women dress the following answers were given:

“Some Muslim women wear burkas or head scarf’s (hijab)” - Architect, 25

“Muslims have dark features- such as dark hair, skin and eyes”
- Insurance Account Manager, 26

“Muslims have darker skin and eyes, however they do not all dress the same way.”
- Officer Management, 26

“Men have beards- generally wear turbans” - Fireman, 27

Five of the respondents specifically identified a Muslim man as one who wears a turban and has a darker complexion than a non-Muslim. In a New York Times article

⁸⁴ For the purpose of this paper an Arab will be defined the following way. “Arab” is a cultural and linguistic term. An Arab is one who speaks Arabic as his or her first language. An Arab can be

titled: *A Nation Challenged: Violence and Harassment; Victims of Mistaken Identity, Sikhs Pay a Price for Turbans*, Goodstein and Lewin write:

“Frightened by a wave of violence and harassment, Sikhs across the country are struggling to explain to an uncomprehending public that despite their turbans and beards, they are not followers of the Taliban [and are not Muslims or followers of the Islamic faith]”⁸⁵

Understanding of Islam

General understanding of Islam was more apparent among those who had some background education or experience with Islam or had Muslim friends. The four respondents that had previously studied Islam said that Muslims do not look a certain way and could be from any nationality or race. Each of the four subjects added that prevalent stereotypes found in the U.S. mainstream media suggest that all Muslims have dark hair, eyes and complexion. The respondents who had previously studied Islam were able to identify more of the fallacies in the media when reporting on Islam and were more willing to openly question the media’s coverage of Islam. Those that had previously studied Islam were not necessarily more informed about the details of the Islamic religion. However, they were more specific in their criticism of the media’s coverage of Islam and in general could draw on more specific examples of how the media portrays Arabs, Muslims and Islam.

Christian, Muslim or Jewish. Arabs do not look a specific way nor do they dress in a specific manner.

⁸⁵ Laurie Goodstein and Tamar Lewin, “A Nation Challenged: Violence and Harassment; Victims of Mistaken Identity, Sikhs Pay a Price for Turbans” *New York Times*, September 19, 2001. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C06EED9123BF93AA2575AC0A9679C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1>> (12 November 2007).

When asked to name one famous Muslim, six of the thirteen respondents could not think of one. Those that did identify a “famous Muslim” named people such as:

“Yassir Arafat” – Book Employee, 25

“Louis Farrakhan and Malcolm X” – Finance Manager, Intel, 35

“Osama bin Laden” – Hartford Insurance, Insurance Broker, 26

“Barak Obama”- Business Student, PSU, 23

In addition to identifying one famous Muslim, the subjects were asked if they had ever visited an Islamic country or if they would want to in the future. None of the thirteen subjects interviewed had been to the Middle East, yet two of the respondents had visited or lived in Turkey.⁸⁶ Responses on travel to an Islamic country ranged from

“I have no interest in going to an Islamic country” – Bookstore Employee, 25

“No not interested in traveling to an Islamic country, I am too worried about my personal health and safety in an Islamic country” – Real Estate Business Owner, 35

“Never been to the Middle East, but would be interested in going to Iraq when it is safe”

- Office Manager, 26

“No never lived or visited an Islamic country, not sure what countries are Islamic”
– Real Estate Broker, 28

Media Sources

I found that seven of the thirteen subjects rarely, if ever, watched mainstream TV news programs.⁸⁷ Those that identified as someone who does watch the news on

⁸⁶ One respondent lived and worked in Turkey during the summer of 2005.

⁸⁷ For the purpose of this thesis, rarely watching the news is defined as watching a news station once per month for less than thirty minutes.

television, watched anywhere from two to three hours per week. Those that watched the news mostly watched the evening news and often the preferred station was either CNN or MSNBC. Five of the thirteen respondents said that they never read physical newspapers; those that did read newspapers often read the *Oregonian*, the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*.⁸⁸

The interviews also revealed that nearly every subject obtained the bulk of his or her news from the Internet. Of the thirteen respondents, only three subjects rarely, if ever, obtained their news on the Internet. Individuals for whom the Internet is their medium of choice opted to obtain 90 percent of what they read from their homepage, which was usually google.com, msn.com or yahoo.com. Few subjects said that they surfed the web for more detailed articles than that, which was printed, on their homepage. Two of the thirteen respondents said that they sought additional information from blogs, which are written by a range of people across the world. The interviews revealed that when reading the news on the Internet, few respondents read more than two to three articles per day.

Based on the above findings, the interviews suggest that the television evening news plays a limited role in shaping the perspectives of young professionals living in Portland, Oregon. That said, every subject responded that they watched

⁸⁸ Those that identified that they read the newspaper often only read the newspaper two to three times per week. Most stories that they read were in the first section of the paper.

Hollywood movies, reality TV and other television on a regular basis.⁸⁹ The subjects confirmed the findings of scholar and film critic Jack Shaheen that Hollywood movies portray, in almost every case, Arab and/or Muslim negatively. When asked how the U.S. mainstream media portrays Islam on television, in the newspapers or in movies, most respondents, regardless of how much they actually watched the news, perceived the U.S. mainstream media as portraying the majority of Arabs and/or Muslims as violent and malicious terrorists. When asked specifically how the mainstream media portrays Islam the subjects responded as follows:

“Media portrays Islam as negatively, makes a hoax of Islam and the ME”
- Design Architect, 23

“Makes Muslims look like bad guys with capes who are twirling their mustaches”
-Bookstore Employee, 26

“ Muslims are idol worshipers and erotic”- General Architect, 25

“ The media always portrays an “Us” vs. “ Them” scenario. Muslims are violent”
-Finance Manager- Intel, 35

“Muslims are always blamed for starting an incident or bombing”
- Business Owner, 30

“Media often shows gun toting men with masks on who are killing people. Never heard of a charity of Islamic Church that gives aid to anyone in need”- Fireman, 27

“Generally ‘them’ (Islam) is portrayed as a threat, the bad guys. We (Americans) don’t understand or get along with ‘them’ ” – Insurance Account Manager, 26

“Every time you read about the Middle East you read about unrest and unwillingness to reach a peace agreement or end any kind of War. Arabs are never portrayed as

⁸⁹ For the purpose of this paper, regular Hollywood movie watching means watching at least one or two Hollywood movies per week.

people. The media fails to provide “insight on the culture, religion or history of those living in the Middle East.”

- Hartford Insurance-Whole Sale Broker, 35

Nearly every respondent said that they associated Muslims with suicide bombings and that this association was sparked by the media’s portrayal of the Iraq war and the fact that most of what the American public hears about Muslims and/or Islam is associated with suicide, bombings and killings. One subject said that the mainstream media “equates Islam specifically with the Middle East and that the Middle East is in constant turmoil.” Thus the assumption is that Islam is a religion of constant turmoil and violence.

When asked if the U.S. mainstream media portrays Islam as a peaceful religion, not one respondent said “yes”. Responses ranged from:

“The media makes Muslims look crazy” – Real Estate Broker, 26

“In war one cannot have a peaceful enemy, and in the War on Terrorism and the Iraq war the enemy is Muslim, therefore Muslims cannot be portrayed as peaceful or the United States would not have an enemy” - Finance Manager- Intel, 35

“Islam is always portrayed as a religion that is at war with the U.S./America”
-Design Architect, 23

“Killings are usually blamed on a higher power (Allah) in the media”
- Business Owner, 30

“Mainstream media does attempt at times to say that Islam is a peaceful religion but since “no specifics are ever used,” I just think it is an attempt by the mainstream media to act like they are not pushing a “negative” agenda against Arabs and Muslims”
- General Architect, 25

“One always sees the image of Muslims burning American flags”
- Real Estate Business Owner, 35

“Conservative TV pushes the divide- uses ‘peace’ as an oxymoron when talking about Muslims” - Finance Manager- Intel, 35

Most respondents replied that terrorists and/or terrorist activities are what come to mind when they think of Arabs, Muslims or Islam. Martyrdom is another association that many of the subjects made when thinking about the Islamic religion. Many subjects suggested that martyrdom is highly valued in the Islamic religion, especially if it is used in an attempt to kill an American (infidel).

When asked if the subjects felt that the mainstream media portrays Islam as peaceful, the respondents were very clear in their answers: no. Such clarity among all the respondents prompted the question: does the mainstream media portray Islam as violent? The subjects' responses were a mixture of contradictory reactions and opinions, which leads one to question, If the Islamic religion is not portrayed as peaceful and it is not portrayed as violent, then how is it portrayed in the mainstream media? The subjects responded as follows:

“The media does not say Islam is specifically violent, however the media chooses only to report violence” – General Architect, 25

“Islam is portrayed as violent. I think this is because the belief systems in Islam are so different then Christianity, thus Islam does teach violence” –Business Owner, 30

“The media fails to convey the whole picture/story, thus Islam is seen as violent” -
- Construction Management Masters Degree at Stanford University, 25

“Muslims is portrayed as violent, Muslims are always yelling on the TV”
- Insurance Account Manager, 26

“Seems like wars have been going on in the Middle East forever”
- Real Estate Business Owner, 35

“ The news coverage on TV ad I the newspaper reports is very negative, i.e. suicide bombing, people being shot, torture or killings” –Office Manager, 26

“ The media highlights all the things that Muslims will do for Allah”
- Hartford Insurance-Whole Sale Broker, 25

Most of the respondents said that the mainstream media portrays Islam as synonymous with violence, which is further backed by negative media stories, which involve warfare, killings and pandemic poverty at the hands of Muslims, Arabs or the Islamic religion. No respondent cited a specific example of a report or newspaper article, but each respondent who said the media furthered a violent perspective of Islam was adamant in his/her response and quick to reiterate the negative coverage.

When asked about the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood, three respondents said they could not think of an example of a movie in which Arabs and/or Muslims were portrayed. Other responses included:

“Moves portray Arabs as backwards, sleazy and fanatical”

- General Architect, 25

“Muslims always gets the role of being a terrorist” – Bookstore Employee, 25

“Arabs are portrayed horrible- exploit a circumstance to search the greatest common denominator- religion” - Finance Manager- Intel, 35

“Arabs are depicted as violent, not rational and knowledgeable” –Business Owner, 30

“Hollywood does not acknowledge the positives that Muslims have contributed to culture and society” – Office Manager, 26

When asked how Muslims are portrayed in Hollywood all the respondents said that Arabs and/or Muslims are portrayed almost exclusively in a negative light. No respondent could think of a positive depiction of an Arab and/or Muslim in Hollywood, and most respondents said that the only depiction of an Arab and/or Muslim that came to mind was that of a terrorist. Such a remark draws a direct

correlation between Muslim people and “terrorists”, thus leaving little room for true understanding, empathy or distinction between 1.2 billion Muslims and a minority of Islamic fundamentalists. Other than depicting Arabs and/or Muslims as violent, other descriptive words used were ambiguous, sleazy, sketchy, fanatical, rude, polygamous, irrational or backward, hateful and/or turban wearers. Two respondents said they would not want to travel to the Middle East because of what they saw in the movies, and one respondent said that she feared the governments in the Middle East because they seemed very “scary.” It is apparent from the interviews that Hollywood is one of the greatest influences that help to shape and inform the American mind and perspective of the Arab and/or Muslim.

When asked if Muslims were portrayed differently from other religious groups in Hollywood, all thirteen respondents responded, “Yes, Muslims are treated differently than other religious groups.” Many of the respondents argued that Muslim and Arab people are the latest scapegoat in Hollywood, following the stereotype of the evil and devious Russian. One of the individuals who studied Islam prior to the interview said that she thought Muslims were highlighted more negatively in Hollywood than other religious groups such as Jews or Catholics stating:

“Few non-Muslim Americans know a Muslim, thus Muslims in general are misunderstood and believed to be mysterious by the average American”
- General Architect, 25

The respondent’s statement suggests that because Muslims are less known and more misunderstood than other religious groups in the United States, Muslims have become a scapegoat in Hollywood movies and television comedy. A few respondents

suggested that the increase in negative stereotypes in Hollywood, specifically of Islam, have spiked since the Al-Qaeda attacks September 11, 2001 in the United States. One individual drew the correlation between Muslims and other religious groups in Hollywood stating:

“Other ethnicities such as those from India are portrayed as compassionate, funny, and smart in Hollywood movies, but this is not the case for Arabs and Muslims, thus they are always portrayed negatively” - Finance Manager- Intel, 35

Defining Terrorism

In analyzing the mainstream media the respondents were asked to explain how they think the mainstream media in the United States defines terrorism. This question generated a lot of different answers and at times much confusion. The answers ranged from “a person’s choice to use violence to express their opinion and or themselves” to “any threat to American society, economy or a physical threat that interrupts one’s day to day life.” One respondent said that he thought terrorism as defined by the U.S. mainstream media today suggests that terrorism started in the United States on September 11, 2001. Before the attacks of September 11, 2001, this individual never thought about terrorism and did not think that it existed in the world. One respondent said that he believed that the mainstream media suggested that the word terrorist was synonymous with Muslim. Two respondents said that they thought President George W. Bush was the most influential person who defined terrorism and that whenever President Bush makes a speech on terrorism the word “terrorism” evolves and takes on a new meaning to suit the president’s specific message. One respondent, when asked

how she defined terrorism, said she had never thought about the definition of the word, thus she did know how to define terrorism.

At the end of the interview each respondent was asked four specific questions concerning his/her personal interaction and reaction with a Muslim in a specific setting. The first question was, "Based on the way that the mainstream media portrays Muslims would you feel uncomfortable sitting next to a Muslim on an airplane? Eight of the thirteen individuals said "no." they would not feel uncomfortable sitting on an airplane next to an identified Muslim. The respondents' answers ranged from the fact that some believe that the safety measures implemented by the U.S. government have secured airplane travel, thus, if someone were to try to bring a knife or gun onto the airplane, the U.S. security apparatus would catch the perpetrator. Another individual said she was always aware of possible Arabs and/or Muslims on an airplane, as "Muslims are the ones who cause terrorist acts." Another individual said that she was constantly aware of Muslims as "September 11, 2001 is always running through one's head" when on an airplane. Another individual said if he was on an airplane with his son, and they were seated next to an identified Muslim, he would ask to move seats, as his primary objective as a parent was to "keep his child safe at any cost against any danger." Others responded that they could not help but be conscious of an Arab and/or Muslim on the airplane and that one of the results of September 11, 2001, is being generally aware of one's surroundings and the type of person who is in close proximity. It is important to note that to date the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee has received "over sixty cases in which passengers [in the United States],

both men and women, perceived to be Arab have been expelled from an aircraft after boarding because a fellow passenger or crew member did not like the way they looked.”⁹⁰

I found the questions, which addressed one’s comfort level among Muslims and/or Arabs particularly difficult to ask and for people to answer because such questions are very personal and have the potential to embarrass or humiliate the respondent. However, I focused on how the mainstream media in particular has contributed to one’s perspective, which I think provided an opportunity for the respondent to attribute his or her answer to the influence of the mainstream media, and thus not feel uncomfortable in admitting to fears or prejudices.

Some of the more interesting answers to emerge from the interviews came when the subject was asked if the mainstream media’s portrayal of Islam would make him or her feel uncomfortable sitting next to a person reading a Koran on an airplane. Two of the thirteen respondents were unsure of what the Koran was and how it was related to Islam. Eight of the thirteen respondents said “no,” they would not feel directly uncomfortable, and of those eight, four said they would take note of the Koran and feel the same towards someone reading a Bible on an airplane. Those who did fear a person reading the Koran on an airplane said that they feared that the “Muslim would be instructed by the Koran to commit an act of terror.” Another said that they

⁹⁰ “ADC Fact Sheet: The Condition of Arab Americans Post 9/11,” The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. n.d. <http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=282> (20 July 2007), 1. In each case a person the person removed was of Middle Eastern or Asian appearance and in each case the subject was offered seats on subsequent flights without any additional security checks.

would feel uncomfortable sitting next to someone reading the Koran if the person was not dressed in traditional Muslim attire and/or if the “terror alert” was higher than usual.

I found the answers to this particular question very interesting as they suggest that the majority of the respondents did not feel that seeing a person reading from the Koran was a direct threat to their safety. I also found it interesting that some respondents would have a greater fear of Muslims who did not follow the practices of Islam than those who follow its basic tenets. In previous questions, many of the respondents suggested that the mainstream media portrayed Islam as a violent religion, but when asked directly if they would feel uncomfortable around a Muslim reading the Koran, i.e. the guidebook on how to be a Muslim, the majority of the respondents did not associate this act with violence or a threat to personal safety.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodology

After interviewing each subject in private I feel that this was the best way to go about collecting the data. I think that the interview was structured in a way that provided an opportunity for the subject to be most comfortable with me before being asked the more personal questions. I also think that the interview questions were clear and direct, which provided an opportunity for the subject to evaluate his or her comfort zone and think about the question before answering. I found that many of those who answered the question immediately often thought about the question again later in the interview, which led them to revisit the question and expand in more detail on their original comment.

Another strength in the research is that I interviewed nearly as many women as men; there were six women and seven men for a total of thirteen. I found that the gender of the subject did not impact his or her perspective and that stereotypes of Muslims and the Islamic religion were prevalent regardless of one's gender or age.

One of the weaknesses in the methodology is that I was only able to interview thirteen subjects. It would be interesting in the future to expand the research and document as many as one hundred young professionals and to compare the role of the mainstream media in conjunction with one's perception of Muslims and the Islamic religion post-September 11, 2001. I also think that it would have benefited the research if I had polled the subjects' responses to a question about how to improve the perception of Muslims and the Islamic religion in the United States.

The topic of Islamophobia and the media is difficult as there are so many factors to take into account when looking at what has contributed to Islamophobia in the United States, thus I could have expanded on any number of comments made by those interviewed and written an entirely new thesis.

Interview Conclusions

Based on the results of the interview it is apparent that the U.S. mainstream media has contributed to an increase of Islamophobia among the American public post-September 11, 2001. Not a single respondent said that Islam is portrayed as a peaceful, understanding or loving religion. Not one respondent could remember a media story, either on the television or in the newspaper, which portrayed Muslims as anything other than violent, hateful, greedy or victims of a war zone. Positive

perceptions of Islam or Muslims were absent in all of the respondents' answers, as was the belief that the mainstream media in the United States is actively working to portray Muslims and the Islamic religion as anything other than inferior and spiteful.

It is interesting that most of the respondents formed their perspectives of Muslims either from online news sources/articles, Hollywood movies or other media modes. Less than a quarter of the subjects interviewed watched the nightly news between two to five times per week. While it is unclear exactly what mainstream media outlets are the most influential in increasing Islamophobia amongst the American public, it is very clear that the U.S. mainstream media plays an influential role in shaping perceptions and furthering the stereotype that Muslims and the Islamic religion are inherently violent.

While few respondents watched the nightly news, most debunked the façade that the nightly news is an objective media source, designed to inform instead of sensationalize the news to the general public. Television mottos such as CNN: Your Most Trusted News; FOX NEWS: We Report, You Decide and MSNBC: A Fuller Spectrum of News, were highlighted by the recipients as media "propaganda" bites used to mislead the viewer into believing in the validity and integrity of the news station.

While my thesis was not designed to address the topic of media integrity, it seems that most of the subjects harbored an inherent distrust for the actual mainstream news networks. A number of respondents said that the mainstream media twisted, exploited and utilized specific information and scenarios to further a pre-existing

agenda. Not a single respondent said that they trusted the news or believed that the media networks were objective or centrist in their reporting of events associated with Muslims or the Islamic religion. It is difficult to interpret the true influence of the mainstream media when the respondents say they do not trust their media source, yet they regurgitate the media message of violence, distrust and hostility.

I found during the interview process some of the subjects' perceptions of "what kind of people" are Muslims to be very interesting. To be more clear, three of the subjects I knew personally, thus I was aware that they knew and were friends with a Muslim/s. However, when asked if they knew a Muslim or had a Muslim friend, all three subjects said no. When asked if Muslims look a specific way, all three described Muslims in stereotypical ways i.e. dark-haired, dark eyes, etc. While I would like to do more research on this issue, the results of the interview lead me to believe that even those who have Muslim friends do not identify their friends as "Muslim" because their "Muslim friend" does not fit the stereotype of "who" a Muslim is. While this discovery initially may seem disturbing, it is actually a prime example of the change in perception that occurs according to whether a person considers an individual or a group. On an individual level the subject is able to see the Muslim as a human, one who is dynamic and interesting, one who is similar to oneself. However, when the Muslim friend is transferred into the context of a group, he or she becomes unrecognizable, since the perception of the Muslim is of someone who is angry, violent, scary, mischievous, etc. What this shows is that on a one-on-one level a Muslim and a non-Muslim are able to relate to each other and to find similarities and

common ground. It is the connection and opportunity that needs to be built on in order to break down the mainstream media umbrella which sweeps Muslims into one homogenous group, thus failing to acknowledge the wide range of diversity within the Islamic religion and the commonalities between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The interview results confirmed the notion that the mainstream media's presentation of Muslims has directly led to an increase in the demonization of the Islamic religion and the perception of its adherents as backward, angry and/or violent.⁹¹ The increase of Islamophobia among the American public has also created a "polarization in the wider [U.S.] society and provokes discrimination and injustice towards Muslims in all walks of life," including the political, economic and social sphere.⁹²

In a report published by the Council on American-Islamic Relations in 2006, Americans, when interviewed, furthered the stereotype that "Muslims value life less than other people and that the Muslim religion teaches violence and hatred."⁹³ Such comments were similar to the opinions offered by those interviewed for this thesis. Specifically when asked how the mainstream media portrays Islam, those interviewed said they felt that Muslim people hate Americans, that it is dangerous to live in the Middle East and that the Islamic religion is violent. In a USA Today/Gallup poll

⁹¹ Amber Haque, *Confronting Islamophobia In Educational Practice* (Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2004), 9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹³ "The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States 2007," The Council on American-Islamic Relations, n.d. < <http://sun.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/2007-Civil-Rights-Report.pdf>> (17 September 2007), 30.

conducted in August 2006, when asked, 22 percent of Americans said that they would not want American Muslims as neighbors.⁹⁴ While this thesis did not ask the same question, only three of thirteen people interviewed had friends or colleagues who identified as Muslim. It is not clear from the interviews exactly what facet of the United States' media is responsible for the rise of Islamophobia, and exactly what other elements such as education, travel experience, familiarity with Arabs and Muslims, etc. have also contributed to the prevalent stereotypes and perceptions associated with Islam. What is clear is that there has been an increase of Islamophobia in the United States post-September 11, 2001 and this rise is at least in part a result of portrayals of Muslims in the U.S. media.

Future Study

The mainstream media in the United States, not just when reporting on Islamophobia, but on an array of cultural issues, is very influential and pivotal to our understanding of society as a whole. This study of Islamophobia looks primarily at how the United States' mainstream media presents events in the Middle East, portrays Muslims and Arabs and reports on news concerning the Islamic world. While there are a thousand roads one could take to expand on this paper, I would specifically look at researching the role of Islamic resistance movements between the 1930s and the present and how these movements influenced western Islamophobia. I would also include a sub-section on how the media portrays Osama bin Laden, Iranian president, Ahmed Ahmadinejad and Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamel al-Maliki and how this portrayal contributes to or alleviates Islamophobia in the United States. Lastly, if I were to expand on this paper, I would interview Muslims and ask them how to address Islamophobia in the United States and whether or not they think Islamophobia in the United States is a trend that can be bucked in the near future.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 6.

Conclusion

Examining the role and impact of the American mainstream media and whether or not the media contributes to or alleviates Islamophobia in the United States is a very timely and important topic in a post-September 11, 2001 world. The interviews conducted in this research, in conjunction with the literature review, leads one to conclude that the mainstream media in the United States, post-September 11, 2001, continues to contribute to the rise of Islamophobia. While it is unclear exactly what medium is most influential in creating and spreading negative stereotypes associated with Muslims, Arabs and the Islamic religion, it is clear that the mainstream media is very influential in projecting and reporting specific images and stories which lead the American public to pigeon-hole who and what a Muslim is, looks like and acts like. In the case of Islamophobia the mainstream media in the United States has been one of the greatest influences in furthering the perception in the collective memory of America that Arabs and Muslims are “evil” and “anti-American” and “terrorists”. Such perceptions are what continue to be recycled through the mainstream media, educational institutions, government policies and in the mind of the average American.

The interviews conducted in this thesis lead one to believe that there is a general negative bias towards Muslims and Arabs in the United States and that many of these biases stem from what people see on television and in the movies, or what they read on the Internet or in the newspapers. It is also clear from the literature that the negative stereotyping, perceptions and aggressive behavior towards Muslims and

Arabs did not start after the September 11, 2001 attacks, but rather has been prevalent in U.S. and European history. This historical background, coupled with twentieth-century colonialism, capitalism and globalization leads one to believe that it was the attacks of September 11, 2001 that enabled the prejudices and racist feelings already harbored by many Americans towards Muslims, Arabs and the Islamic religion to become socially acceptable. It is apparent from the interviews that those who have been exposed to the Islamic religion, studied the Middle East or have a Muslim friend (which they identify) are more knowledgeable and understanding of the Islamic religion and people from the Middle East. Such people are also more empathetic towards Muslims and Arabs, less likely to stereotype and less likely to believe that all Muslims and/or Arabs are terrorists.

While it is apparent from the interviews conducted that the attacks of September 11, 2001 did play a large role in highlighting the potential and ability of those in the Islamic world to inflict pain and create fear in the United States, it also became apparent that the mainstream media has maximized and sensationalized such fears in order to produce reactions in their viewers. While most subjects interviewed said that they believed that the mainstream media pushed a negative agenda against Muslims and Arabs, all the subjects seemed interested in generally learning more about the Islamic religion and the Middle East.

It is apparent from the interviews that while most of the subjects interviewed believe a lot of the stereotypes regarding Muslims and Arabs, most subjects are also aware that the mainstream media has its own agenda, which slants its coverage of

Muslims and Arabs. The interview results reflected the vast misperceptions and stereotypes of the Middle East, Islamic world and the Islamic religion by both highly educated and working young professionals. While I expected that some subjects would not know as much as others concerning Muslims and Arabs, it was impossible to be prepared for such sweeping ignorance and lack of knowledge across the board. That said, subjects seemed willing and eager to explore in greater detail the Islamic religion and the traditions and practices of those in the Middle East in hopes of gaining a greater understanding of the Islamic world. However, it is important to point out that having studied the Middle East did not lead to substantially greater understanding of the tenets of Islam. For non-Muslims to learn more about Islam, the burden falls on the shoulders of Muslims, especially American Muslims, who must provide opportunities for non-Muslims to learn more, actively correct the inaccurate media reporting and speak out and clarify the tenets and peaceful nature of Islam.

While it not apparent from the mainstream media, the research suggests that many Americans are genuinely interested in learning more about Islam and the Middle East. The fact that those who know Muslims but did not acknowledge their friendship during the interview provides insight that once one is familiar with the so-called “other,” stereotypes are broken down and the status quo no longer applies. If people are unable to identify the traits that they associate with a “Muslim” in their Muslim friends then it speaks to the power of knowledge and familiarity, the ability to defy the group mentality, and the strength and sense of connection arising from dialogue. It is apparent from this thesis that a lot can be done by both the American government, the

U.S. media establishment, education system and Muslims themselves to address Islamophobia and break down the stereotypes, perceptions, fears and misunderstanding between Eastern and Western culture. The research suggests that there is a lot of opportunity to build dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslim communities expand knowledge in the education system and alter the American justice system to afford equal rights and opportunity to American Muslims and Arabs.

What happened on September 11, 2001 in New York, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania were not the acts of those who practice the Islamic religion. Such acts were committed by nineteen people who had a perverted, corrupt and vicious vendetta against the United States. Such acts should not be deemed a reflection of those living in the Islamic world or Middle East. Unfortunately, such acts have been portrayed by the U.S. mainstream media as a reflection of how those who live in the Middle East and the Islamic world feel, think and perceive the United States. This research shows that in order to stop the increase of Islamophobia in the United States we need to stop stereotyping the Islamic religion, Arabs and Muslims, and we need to begin learning more and be more accepting towards those who are different from us. It is also essential that the American public holds the mainstream media accountable for reporting both sides of each story and demands that it stop the generalizations and racial slurs towards the “other”. Only media accountability will promote the end of racial and religious intolerance, segregation, racial profiling and the use of secret evidence. The results of this research lead one to find hope that it is possible to reverse

the trend of Islamophobia in the United States. However, time is of the essence as the rift between the West and East continues to grow each day.

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APPENDIX A

Recommendations: Addressing the Rise of Islamophobia in the United State

In order to combat the rise of Islamophobia, this thesis proposes the following seven recommendations designed to help acknowledge, address and ultimately decrease Islamophobia and further the American public's understanding of the Islamic religion, Muslims and Arabs.

1. The Role Of The Mainstream Media

The status quo of the mainstream media in the United States when reporting on the Middle East needs a drastic overall in terms of topic choice, verbiage, footage and commentary. In order to decrease Islamophobia in the next decade, it is vital that the U.S. mainstream media take direct, drastic and productive measures to assure that coverage of Islam, Muslims and Arabs is accurate, respectful and more positive than negative. The first step to changing the dominant paradigm in the United States concerning Muslims and Islamic religion is to debunk all stereotypes that further the assumption that all Muslims are violent, evil, wealthy, terrorists, etc. In order to counteract stereotypes one must first learn how to recognize and identify a stereotype. While there are both positive and negative, deductive and inductive stereotypes, it is important to recognize that most stereotypes concerning Muslims have a negative connotation that may or may not be true. In examining Islamophobia it is necessary for people not to make cultural generalizations about Muslims or to assume that the one or two Muslims that they know or have seen in the media represent "all" Muslims. Currently, the mainstream media often interviews or portrays the "deviant" Muslim

who is often a reflection of the inductive stereotype. That said, the token Muslim portrayed in the mainstream media could be the one “evil” Muslim or the only Muslim to have engaged in cross-cultural experience. It is important to recognize that Muslims embody an array of cultures, practices, behaviors, etc, thus a “Muslim” cannot be pigeonholed into a specific stereotype. In order to overcome Islamophobia critical thinking must be applied so that generalizations are not made, sweeping statements are not perceived as factual and racial remarks against Muslims are regarded as inappropriate and subject to legal action.

Based on the answers of all recipients interviewed, each felt that the current U.S. mainstream media primarily focused on the negative aspects of Islam and the Arab world. Amber Haque in her book *Confronting Islamophobia In Educational Practice*, suggests that in order for the American public to obtain a greater understanding and learn about the positive elements of the Islamic religion, it is imperative that the mainstream media interview respected Muslims, not those that are controversial either in the Muslim or non-Muslim community.⁹⁵ The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee has spent the last twenty-seven years tracking and responding to negative media reports on Arab-American issues in the United States. One recommendation to decrease negative, biased or inaccurate reporting concerning Islam or the Middle East is for more Arab and/or Muslims to become involved and employed by television, radio and/or mainstream media agencies.

⁹⁵ Amber Haque, *Confronting Islamophobia In Educational Practice* (Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2004), 13.

In addressing the role and impact of the mainstream media it is imperative that the role of power is addressed and recognized. At the moment those who are Muslim are disempowered and have less access, creditability, funding and support to address the rise of Islamophobia in the United States. It is vital that the American mainstream media recognize the power inequality between Muslim and non-Muslims as well as the inequality of access to the media by the two respective groups. It is also important that the mainstream media make a conscious effort to report the positive aspects of Muslim communities and the Muslim world. The mainstream media in the United States has the power to influence and ultimately change American public opinion. In order to make a permanent mark on mainstream media reporting, it is the obligation of the media conglomerate to actively break down stereotypes of Muslims, stop reporting only on the violent facets of the Middle East and stop associating Muslims with all “terrorist” activity worldwide.

Another way the mainstream media can insure an array of perspectives is to report on stories that are covered and aired on the Arabic TV channel Al-Jazeera. Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, Al-Jazeera has expanded its media coverage to include English, thus Americans who pay for the Al-Jazeera TV channel can watch news broadcasts that are transmitted all over the Middle East. Al-Jazeera also has a website which provides coverage of issues concerning the Middle East and the world from an Arab and/or Muslim perspective.

2. Education

In order to address the Arab and Muslim world in a fair and balanced manner it is imperative that U.S. educational institutions adopt a multicultural and intercultural curriculum. Looking at the Islamic world and the Western world through an intercultural lens will cultivate greater understanding and relationship building. If non-Muslims and Muslims can begin to build relationships based on trust, honesty, empathy and mutual understanding then there is a greater opportunity for dialogue and a breakdown of stereotypes. Intercultural and multicultural curricula will enable American students to learn about the different religions, languages, foods and traditions that comprise the Arab and Islamic world. In order to break down and rebuild a positive perspective of the “other”, it is crucial that students and adults do not only associate violence, war, poverty, killing, wealth, etc. with the Middle East and the Islamic world.

Islamophobia has been able to permeate American culture because few Americans understand the diversity, complexities and ever-evolving social, geographical and political issues that define and shape the Muslim identity and the Islamic religion. One way to humanize both the Arab and the Muslim in the classroom is to highlight the contributions made by the Arab and Islamic world to the West. Such contributions include but are not exclusive to literature, geography, math, science, art and food exploration. In understanding one’s culture it is necessary to recognize that each individual is a unique representative of his or her culture, thus interaction

between Muslims and non-Muslims is one of the very best tools to familiarize everyone with one another.

Education on Islam and the Middle East is paramount if there is to be a revival of understanding and dialogue between the East and the West. While there are an array of models and tools that can be adapted to address cultural insensitivity between Muslims and non-Muslims, one specific model created by Milton J. Bennett is called the Development of Intercultural Sensitivity. This particular model has six stages, in which Bennett describes movement across a continuum from ethnocentrism to ethno-relativism, thus an evolution in which people move across cultural sensitivity spectrums as they become more knowledgeable, accepting and interactive with another person's culture. Such a model charts the evolution of attitudes and behavior towards others over a period of time. The six intercultural stages are:

1. **Denial:** One does not recognize or understand another person's culture. One's own culture is the only culture one knows and thinks matters.
2. **Defense:** One is often threatened by another person's culture. One often sees the world through an "Us" vs. "Them" lens, in which the other is often viewed in a negative way.
3. **Minimization:** Minimize cultural experiences and differences of the "other". Acknowledge some cultural differences such as food and language but in general believe that all people are essentially the same.

4. **Acceptance:** Acknowledges that people have different cultures that have both positive and negative facets. Is comfortable with ambiguity and is able to accept differences, while they themselves may think differently.
5. **Adaptation:** One's worldview is expanded to include other people's worldview and culture. One often spends time in another's culture. At this stage one is able to be empathic and understand the "other's" perspective.
6. **Integration:** People are in and out of different worldviews. Interchangeable worldviews are common and no dominant worldview exists. This stage embraces the interculturalist or multiculturalist in conjunction with one's original national and ethnic backgrounds.⁹⁶

Bennett's model of Development of Intercultural Sensitivity enables one to move from an ethnocentric base (experience of one's own culture as 'central to reality') to the last three stages, which are ethno-relative based (viewing one's own culture as just one organization of reality amongst many legitimate possibilities).⁹⁷ Such a transition is difficult and takes time but when it occurs it provides an opportunity for one who could not relate or understand the "other" to become interconnected, understanding and at least open to the idea that other cultures are compatible and non-threatening to one's own.

⁹⁶ Dan Sheffield, "Assessing Intercultural Sensitivity in Mission Candidates and Personnel," *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*, 43, no 1 (2007), 3

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 3

3. Muslims Need to Actively Combat Islamophobia

In order to combat Islamophobia, it is extremely important that those who practice Islam have a true understanding of what it means to be Muslim. This is not to say that all Muslims need to know everything about Islam, rather, when a non-Muslim asks a Muslim about Islam, it would be helpful if those of the Muslim religion could accurately explain the basics of their religion. Hague suggests that a basic understanding of Islam should come from two basic sources, the Koran and the Sunnah.⁹⁸

Another way that Muslims can further education and understanding about what it means to be Muslim in America is through community action and leadership work. In a time when most Americans have questions about the Islamic religion, Muslim community members could hold seminars, conferences and pass out literature. Many campuses across the United States have a Muslim Student Association (MSA). The MSA is one of many ways to reach out to those that may have questions about the Islamic religion, or want to learn more about Islamic tradition and/or history. It is apparent from the interviews that many young people do not know about the Islamic religion or how to obtain accurate information about it. In Portland, Oregon, young people are not exposed to many Muslims their own age. The MSA and other action groups provide an opportunity for Muslims and non-Muslims to interact and learn about one another's culture, practices, religion, identity, politics, etc.

⁹⁸ Amber Haque, *Confronting Islamophobia In Educational Practice* (Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2004), 11. The Sunnah is the sayings of the prophet.

Another way for Muslims (and non-Muslims) to address the rise of Islamophobia is to write letters to mainstream media organizations, newspapers, publishers, politicians, etc. who make public statements that are Islamophobic in nature and promote anti-Muslim rhetoric. The more letters asserting religious and cultural tolerance and decrying hate speech will help to decrease public acceptance of anti-Islamic and Arab rhetoric, which continues to fuel Islamophobia.

One of the challenges to debunking the mainstream media in the United States is that historically Muslims have not been involved or active in the American media, government or legal system. While there are an array of reasons for lack of participation by the Muslim population one of the major reasons is that first-generation Muslims often fear political involvement because of poor leadership and dictatorial practices in their native homeland. It is not unfounded to suggest that the new “American” Muslim may have little to no experience in the political arena. In November 2006, Keith Ellison became the first Muslim American to be elected to the United States Congress. Having Muslim and Arab-Americans in political positions provides opportunity for Muslims to give voice to Arab-American issues and also provides an opportunity for non-Muslims to work and collaborate with Muslims and learn more about the Islamic religion and traditions. Those that are part of the government have a better chance of sponsoring legislation that decreases hate crimes and increases the ramifications of supporting, engaging or condoning such acts.

4. Interfaith Dialogue: Muslims and Non-Muslims Need To Join Together

In order for Muslims to understand other religious faiths such as Christianity and Judaism and for Jews and Christians to understand the Islamic religion, it is imperative that an ongoing dialogue is established between those of different faiths. Through mutual understanding, discussions, acknowledgment and forgiveness, Muslims and non-Muslims can build long-term alliances, which will promote understanding and acceptance among peers and colleagues. Interfaith dialogue is one of the most important mechanisms in building a relationship with those that are of the “Other” faith. One way to highlight that it is wrong to engage or embrace Islamophobic rhetoric is for those of all faiths to publish a public statement between which denounces Islamophobia and all religious intolerance. Such statements can condemn hate speech, highlight commonalities between the different communities, encourage dialogue, and most importantly, denounce all forms of religious racism and intolerance. Awareness of the “Other” brings enhanced understanding between the different parties and reduces the tendency to attribute error to the other side. Awareness also serves to break down the gates of fear, as it is fear, which often leads one to perceive another person as the “Other”. Those of different religions fear that the “Other” is contradicting their faith and often their entire belief system, which often results in the dehumanization and demoralization of the “Other”.

One way the mainstream media could help to build bridges between those in the Middle East and those in the United States is to draw awareness to the fact that many in the Arab world are Christian, Jewish, Baha’i, Coptic, etc. I found it very

interesting that few of the subjects interviewed knew that an Arab could be anything other than a Muslim, such as a Christian or a Jew. The first wave of Arab Christians to immigrate to the United States began around 1875 and lasted to 1920.⁹⁹ To date the majority of Arab-Americans are Christian, with 42 percent identifying as Catholic, 20 percent identifying as Orthodox and 12 percent identifying as Protestant.¹⁰⁰ The common misperception that all Arabs are Muslims clouds the ability of the American public and mainstream media to relate to those in the Arab world who share the same Christian faith. Interfaith dialogue has the opportunity to bring Christians, Muslims and Jews together to discuss religion as well as share cultural and traditional practices and customs.

5.Role and Power of the United States Government

The rise of Islamophobia since September 11, 2001, has been in part due to the policies of the United States government. Such policies often systematically harass, segregate, racially profile or discriminate against Arabs and/or Muslims. The latest study conducted by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, *The Status of Muslim Civil Rights In The United States 2007*, reported that complaints involving discrimination in the U.S. workplace has increased from 19.22 percent in 2005 to

⁹⁹“Arab Americans” Caught In The Crossfire: Arab Americans, PBS n.d.
<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/caughtinthecrossfire/arab_americans.html> (20 July 2007).

¹⁰⁰ “Fact Sheet” Caught In The Crossfire: Arab Americans: Fact Sheet- PBS n.d.
<<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/caughtinthecrossfire/factsheet.html>> (20 July 2007).

26.32 percent in 2006.¹⁰¹ This increase is significant as it reflects that the American public continues to become more anti-Muslim and/or intolerant towards Muslims instead of more educated and understanding towards a population and religion that continues to rapidly grow in the United States and throughout the world. In order to quickly and efficiently stop the advancement of Islamophobia in the U.S. it is imperative that the U.S. federal government set up task agencies which focus specifically on addressing and resolving complaints concerning harassment reported by Muslims. In order to address harassment it is essential that government agencies provide basic training and knowledge of Islam and the practices of Muslims in the workplace. One way to increase understanding is to provide an opportunity for Muslims to practice/celebrate their religious holidays at the office, thus accommodations must be made in the work environment to provide time, space and logistics for Muslims to pray, eat and wear specific clothing if desired. In order to decrease harassment directed towards Arabs and Muslims, local officials and corporate managers must actively denounce discrimination and harassment towards Muslims and Arabs in the workplace. In order for bigotry to truly stop, employees and government officials must be publicly reprimanded and fined for racist and derogatory statements against the Islamic religion, Muslims and Arabs, and any religion for that matter.

¹⁰¹ "The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States 2007" The Council on American-Islamic Relations. n.d. < <http://sun.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/2007-Civil-Rights-Report.pdf>> (17 September 2007), 5.

Education on Islam does not stop in the U.S. school system. Rather education must be present in an array of institutions, especially those that are publicly funded. It is important that hate speech and hate crime when committed under the banner of “Islamophobia” is immediately reprimanded either in the press and/or by the law. Each example of hate speech or hate crime which is Islamophobic in nature should be uniformly labeled “Islamophobic” by those in the media and in the legal system, thus, over time the term Islamophobia will become a standard English expression much like “anti-Semitism” has.¹⁰² As the term Islamophobia gains recognition the acts associated with Islamophobia will become less socially acceptable, thus potentially leading to an overall decrease of Islamophobia among the general U.S. population.

For those who are victims of hate crimes due to the fact that they are Muslim it is important that a system is set up to report such acts. One government agency collecting data is the FBI, and at the end of each year the FBI should share with the public all statistics about hate crimes directed at Muslims. In order to track the increase or decrease of Islamophobia in the United States, it is essential that we have an accurate account of hate crimes conducted against Arabs and Muslim because of their ethnicity and religion.

¹⁰² Abdul Malik Mujahid, “16 Ways you can fight Cartoons and Islamophobia,” Soundvision.com: Islamic Information and Products n.d. <<http://soundvision.com/info/racism/fightingislamophobia.asp>> (8 August 2007).

6. In Preparation For A Future Terrorist Attack

It is inevitable that a terrorist attack will take place in the future in the United States. While it is not inevitable that a Muslim or Arab will commit such an attack, it is realistic to believe that such an attack will initially create havoc within, and most likely violence against, the Arab-American and Muslim communities in the United States. Thus in order to be ready to protect those who could be victims of a future Islamophobic attack it is essential that law enforcement in the United States prepare to combat the violence and harassment now. One way in which law enforcement could prepare itself is to set up a system to report backlash against the Arab and Muslim populations. Such a system would enable victims to report their experience in a safe and private matter. It is also crucial to have a support system in place in which law enforcement can get in immediate contact with prominent Muslims and Arabs in the communities, who can then reassure the Muslim and Arab community and keep people aware of events taking place around them.

Another way to combat violence in the immediate aftermath of a future terrorist act in the United States is to have pre-established relationships built between law enforcement and leaders in the Islamic and Arab communities. Pre-established relationships will help to dissolve miscommunication, better equip the Arab and Islamic communities with accurate reports and updates on the situation and enable targeted communities to feel that they have additional support in ensuring their security and safety during potential chaos.

7. American Justice System

In order to bolster American standing among Arabs and the Islamic world as a whole, the United States Congress should conduct hearings that openly identify the rising tide of Islamophobia both in the media and in the education system. Such an investigation should be conducted on the premise that it will identify the target areas and work to promote reform, which will address and work to eliminate Islamophobia in the United States. Such hearings and seminars have taken place throughout England and other countries in the European Union for the past decade, thus while not perfect, Europe has a far more advanced and tested system of identifying, quantifying and addressing the needs of the Arab and Islamic communities in their respective countries.

One way to show, not just to those living in the United States, but also to people throughout the world, that the United States respects the Islamic religion and is serious about working with Arabs and Muslims to break down stereotypes and build a strong and lasting relationship, is for the United States government to implement and carry out laws that respect the civil liberties of Arabs and Muslims living in the United States. As a way of returning to the long-established American tradition of justice and respect, the U.S. government could stop racial profiling both at the airports and in the criminal justice system and begin treating Arabs and Muslims the same as it treats all other U.S. citizens. The U.S. government could also close down Guantanamo Bay, which fails to abide by international law and which indiscriminately and

unconditionally locks up Muslims and Arabs solely because the government declares them to be dangerous. Currently, no standardized and tested legal system is used to secure the human rights of those imprisoned by the U.S. government at Guantanamo Bay. Lastly, the U.S. government could put an immediate halt to all “secret evidence” cases, which are currently being conducted against numerous Americans in the name of national security. Those three measures alone, notwithstanding those unnamed, would greatly boost trust in and respect for the United States both at home and abroad.

APPENDIX B

Islamophobia Has No Boundaries

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Council on American Islamic Relations and Human Rights Watch have all delivered statements or reports that reveal that it is not only Arabs and Muslims who have become victims of the mainstream media's negative projection of Arabs and Muslims.¹⁰³ Often those who dress, look like or speak like a stereotypical Arab or Muslim also become innocent victims of stereotypes, harassment, assault and violence. There are a handful of documented cases in which a person who "appeared" to be Arab and/or Muslim was assaulted, harassed and in a few cases killed in the United States. One of the more tragic events, which was a direct result of the September 11 2001 attack, was the brutal murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi and Vasudev Patel. Singh Sodhi, a Sikh, and Patel, an Indian, were both wrongly identified by their killers, who were American citizens, to be either Arab and/or Muslim.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ "ADC Fact Sheet: the Condition of Arab American post-September 11." American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. 27 March, 2002.

<[http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=282&no_cache=1&sword_list\[\]=fact&sword_list\[\]=sheet](http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=282&no_cache=1&sword_list[]=fact&sword_list[]=sheet)> (accessed 18 July, 2002).

"The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States 2007." *The Council on American-Islamic Relations*. n.d. < <http://sun.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/2007-Civil-Rights-Report.pdf>> (accessed 17 September, 2007).

"We Are Not The Enemy: Hate Crimes Against Arabs, Muslims And Those Perceived To Be Arab Or Muslims After September 11, 2001." Human Rights Watch, November 2002.

<<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/usahate/>> (accessed 18 July, 2007).

¹⁰⁴ "We Are Not The Enemy: Hate Crimes Against Arabs, Muslims And Those Perceived To Be Arab Or Muslims After September 11, 2001," Human Rights Watch, November 2002.

<<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/usahate/>> 18 July 2007.

While the literature shows that Islamophobia has rapidly increased since Huntington wrote “The Clash of Civilizations” in 1993, Islamophobia as a political and social issue is not anew phenomenon for those living in the European Union. For the past three decades European immigration policies towards those living in the Middle East, South East Asia and North Africa, have fueled an increased dialogue concerning the role of immigrants, specifically the Muslim immigrant, living in European society. Currently, Islamophobia in Europe and the role of European mainstream media in furthering a specific stereotype of a “Muslim” is extensively documented, much more so than in the United States.