

**WHY DO THEY HATE US? : THE POST 9/11 EXPERIENCE OF
ARABS, MUSLIMS AND HOW THE LACK OF EDUCATION
DEEPENS STEREOTYPES AND HATRED**

A Senior Scholars Thesis

by

JILLIAN MCCALL HEGEDUS

Submitted to Honors and Undergraduate Research of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

May 2012

Major: International Studies

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ABSTRACT

Why Do They Hate Us? : The Post 9/11 Experience of Arabs, Muslims and How Lack of Education Deepens Stereotypes and Hatred. (May 2012)

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine the experiences of Arabs, Muslims in this post 9/11 society. The research conducted delves into the experiences of these groups: the stereotypes branded on them by society, the harassment and hate crimes experienced by many in retribution for the attacks on America. A lack of education about the Middle East, Islam and Arabs has embedded the stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs and there is a need for a more balanced curriculum, especially in the state of Texas. The interviews with Arabs and Muslims reflect their own tribulations in a country and more specifically a university that knows little about their religion and culture. These interviews and research were conducted in order to expose the racism and stereotypes still present nearly 11 years after September 11, 2001 and how the lack of response from education systems furthers such things.

DEDICATION

“If you can’t eliminate injustice, at least tell everyone about it.”

- Ali Shariati

To Mom and Dad, who raised me to speak my mind and stand up for what I believe. To Habibi, for his constant support and patience when listening to me rant about this subject, to Dr. Greenwald, who has been a dedicated and extraordinary mentor since my arrival at Texas A&M.

Lastly, to the young woman at King Saud University who inspired this thesis’ title, to Ali, the cab driver who bought me coffee and did not make me pay for the cab ride home, to the cab driver who bought me a cookie for waiting on him, to the young woman who worked at the McDonald’s in Mecca Mall, to the young men who worked at the dress shop in downtown Amman who bought me coffee and practiced Arabic with me, to the manager of the Limana Coffee Shop in the Balad who taught me how to dance, to my patient Arabic teachers at the University of Jordan, to the tailor in the Balad, to the children in Mahata who laughed at my poor Arabic and smiled despite their circumstances; to all the Arabs, Muslims and non-Arab/Muslim Americans I have yet to meet; I pray that someday we can stop asking of the other, why do they hate us?

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CHAPTER I

MY EXPERIENCE

Preface

“So I called a former Texas Representative to see if he could help you out with your research,” said my friend.

“And?” I asked, hopeful his answer would pull me out of the quagmire I was in, thanks to an overzealous research project.

“And he laughed-for a long time, and then the conversation turned pretty racist. He said something along the lines of that he found it somewhat ridiculous that we should want to teach that liberal bull shit.”

Liberal bull shit. I slowly accepted defeat at the hands of a former Texas Representative.

For about a year, I had been researching how the Texas Board of Education’s imbalanced curriculum in Social Studies (meaning there was no focus on the history of the Middle East) led to misunderstandings, stereotypes and ignorance of the Middle East, Arabs and Islam. Prior to the aforementioned conversation that sealed the fate of that research project, I had been trying to receive approval for months to go into public high schools in Texas and research this phenomenon.

This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*.

Needless to say, my phone calls remained unanswered, my inbox empty; it appeared that no Texas school wanted to allow an undergraduate passionate about the Middle East into their hallowed halls of learning to investigate imbalanced curriculum. I had attempted to contact my own alma mater, Cinco Ranch High School, to no avail.

I will not assert any assumption about the Texas Board of Education's curriculum, yet. For now, I will allow the readers to formulate their own opinions until I argue this case later in the paper.

In February, yes, the February that was only two months ago, I decided to change the focus of my research paper. I decided to focus on the post 9/11 experiences of Muslims and Arabs in this country.

I realized when I first started working on this project that I had inadvertently been collecting research on this topic since I was eleven years old, since September 11, 2001 and more so since I decided my major as Middle Eastern Studies and Arabic Studies four years ago. This paper is a conclusion to my career here at Texas A&M University. This project aims to not only discuss the backlash against Arabs & Muslims after 9/11, but my own personal journey as an adolescent who witnessed those terrible acts on September 11th, to my experience as Middle Eastern Studies major at a not so understanding or tolerant university.

This project, which began as an attempt to expose the weaknesses of an education system more focused on ideology than unbiased knowledge has morphed into a more personal account and research of a timely and important issue. If the reader would like to bypass my personal account for a more 'traditional' research paper, please proceed to page 39.

I hope that Arabs and Muslims who attend this institution, the millions in this country, and the billion that live outside America can stop wondering, "Why do they hate me?"

Today is March 28, 2012. September 11, 2001 happened ten years and six months ago.

Forgiving does not mean forgetting those atrocious acts that killed 3,000 innocent people. It means educating yourself about Islam, the Middle East, Arabs, history of the Middle East-anything that breaks down those cultural barriers and misconceptions. It means forgiving and choosing to walk a path of peace, tolerance and love-not hate.

It has been nearly eleven years, it is time to stop hating, to stop the racial slurs, the hate crimes, the harassment, the preconceived notion that one can judge another simply because of their religion or ethnicity.

It is time to forgive.

Personal experience

Why does this matter?

A narrative is a powerful and yet often overlooked tool because it explains the emotions and experiences of a human being and allows the writer to illustrate a certain moment in his life. The following is my account, my narrative, my journey after September 11th. I am including this because I could not in good conscience assert my opinion or present this research without first establishing my legitimacy. I am neither Muslim, nor Arab, but after 9/11 I followed a different path than many of my compatriots. I chose to study the Middle East and Arabic. Yet, I wanted this narrative to illustrate that in the beginning of this journey I was a young, eleven year old girl from Texas who watched my country being attacked by a dangerous enemy. I cried when I watched those towers fall and asked of the attackers, how could you do this? I love my country and am and always will be a loyal American. But I differ from many in that I have travelled to the Middle East, am learning the language, studied Islam, terrorism, extremism--you name it and therefore have a much different opinion of the Middle East than most. The first step toward enlightenment happened on a Tuesday in 2001. I realize that this account has my own persona biases in it; I am not trying to skew the facts, just explain my story in my own words. I have also included a few interviews from others at Texas A&M and their experience after 9/11. The intentions of those interviews were to provide a human face of Muslims and Arabs at this university. Please refer to the Appendix to read these stories.

September 11, 2001

‘Wow, another person just got called to go home!’ I thought, while eating the bologna sandwich my mother packed for me. It was a typical Tuesday for junior high Jill, lunch time as upon the 6th grade class, with five more class periods to follow.

My twelfth birthday was just three short days away. Twelve seemed such cooler than eleven, so I was anxiously awaiting my celebratory dinner at Joe’s Crab Shack that would usher in a new era of sixth grade, where I left my fifth grade age of eleven for a much more mature number.

Today was not so different from any other, minus my keen observation that a lot of my classmates were leaving early. My thought process concluded that they all had doctors or dentist appointments. Maybe Tuesdays were just hot spots for medical appointments?

After lunch, I walked with friends to our 4th period World Geography Class. The announcement my teacher made in this class would make my doctor appointment thesis null. She said our country had been attacked, she was not allowed to say more, but she said that something very bad had happened. She was very vague, and saying that statement to twenty-five 6th graders started the rumor mill.

“The White House has been attacked!”

“I hear the President is dead!”

“Houston is NEXT! We have a big port so we’re going to be attacked next!”

My seventh period English teacher cleared things up a bit for the scared adolescents who were too busy rattling off theories to pay attention to that day’s grammar lesson. Against the guidance of the administration which was apparently comfortable with keeping us all in the dark, she told us about the events that had transpired earlier that day. She said that the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had been attacked but we should stop worrying. This discussion stopped the rumors, but we were not allowed to turn on the television and see what had happened that morning. We finished the day ignorant of the life changing events that had occurred. Our principal addressed the school before the bell rang in our 9th period advisory class.

“A tragedy has happened today in Washington D.C and New York City. That is all I can say for now, but if you choose to stay home tomorrow due to these events, you will be allowed to do so.”

I rode home on the bus, still confused as to what was actually going on. Maybe my principal thought it best to not give us details, but I desperately wanted to know.

I opened the front door, my mother was upstairs. She peered over the landing

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“I don’t know Mom. Can I turn on the TV?”

I do not recall how many times I watched those towers fall, the news was a broken record...showing repeat after repeat. I was having a hard time understanding what was going on. Who would fly planes into buildings, knowing that so many would perish?

The government had determined by that night that it had been Islamic extremists who had committed these acts of terror; Muslims, hailing from the region of the Middle East.

I remember worrying that night about a girl who was in my math class. She was Turkish. Somehow I knew most people from Turkey were Muslims. I cannot say how I knew that, given the fact that schools in Texas do not really touch on countries in the Middle East all that much, but I knew she would not be in school tomorrow. I worried for her, for I knew things would be forever different for those who were Muslim or who looked Middle Eastern.

The days that followed

The next day, in an immediate attempt to assert our patriotic loyalty to our country, my father hung outside the only American flag we owned. It was a huge veteran’s flag that my mother received at the funeral of my grandfather, a World War II veteran. It was gigantic and covered our whole entryway-the biggest on the block. I was proud of that ostentatious flag, proud that my family looked so patriotic.

For my birthday I received an American Flag made with Christmas lights. It was basically blue, red and white lights strung in a way that it resembled a crude American flag. I happily displayed it in my bedroom window, lit it every night, a beacon of loyalty to the country I dearly love.

I love the United States of America. My favorite holiday was the 4th of July when citizens gave tribute to the best ‘go away and leave us alone’ letter ever written in history. When Thomas Jefferson so eloquently penned that sometimes, “in the course of human events it was necessary to dissolve the political binds that tied one nation to another, that we believed that all men were created equal and given by their creator the unalienable rights of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” (Jefferson). And we happily celebrated by firing off fireworks over the land of the free and the home of the brave. I was a child-obsessed with my country. I begged my parents to take me to all the great historical sites that this country had to offer and coerced by mother into taking me to see Mel Gibson’s, *The Patriot* despite its ‘R’ rating when I was only eleven years old.

After my country was attacked, I watched my peers, my classmates turn into ‘experts’ on the Middle East and Islam, and listened as they referred to people they knew so little about in such disgusting and racist terms. I watched my president, a man from Texas, call for revenge against those responsible for the attacks. George W. Bush called for a ‘war on terror’ against the man who had planned the September 11 attacks, Osama bin Laden. He was a man with a long beard, long robe, and a Kalashnikov by his side. This

frightening man had the blood of 3,000 Americans on his hands and he would soon pay for attacking the greatest nation on earth.

Afghanistan

About a month after the attacks, my family and I were in Dallas at the annual state fair. We were walking around the car exhibits when we noticed a small group of people huddled around a tiny television. We joined this gaggle and watched as the reporter explained the newest headline. We had officially attacked the nation of Afghanistan, for harboring bin Laden.

Wait, what?

War? Is this truly our reaction? Revenge? The entire nation of Afghanistan would have to meet our brute force because their stubborn government refused to turn over one man?

I looked at my mother; she had a look of great sadness on her face as she stared at the television screen. She already did not like the president; here was more fuel to her anti-Bush fire.

I suppose it's pertinent to explain that my upbringing was also different than many of my peers. My parents grew up in Ohio and moved to Texas, 'as fast as possible!' they always joke. Tired of the cold winters, polluted rivers that sometimes, without warning,

burst into flames (I hear the Cuyahoga River is much better these days), my mother and father left Parma, Ohio for Houston Texas. I often ask what the allure was, for my father to accept a job thousands of miles away from the only state that had ever called home. Their response was that John Travolta's *Urban Cowboy* made Houston, Texas look 'so cool'.

Since they grew up in the Mid-West, their perspectives and opinions differed from our neighbors. I shall admit now that my parents hang left and like it there-my mother more so than my father. I credit this to an upbringing that preached tolerance, respect for all regardless of race, acceptance, and loving just about everyone-no matter what. Loving, because as my very Catholic mother says, Jesus said to love all. We were Democratic Catholics in Texas, not a family of WASPs that flitted about the hive of acceptance.

I bring this up, not to talk about how wonderful my family is (a tome would be necessary to give my family's stellar reputation justice) but to explain how I remained open minded in the time that passed after September 11th. Growing up with parents who were not the type to hate or call for revenge against enemies but to educate ourselves about a group, religion or culture set precedence for me and my siblings.

Back at the fair, Big Tex waved and spoke to passerby, and we were still glued to a television that discussed our new war. Soon, the media unleashed a new vocabulary on its viewers. Words like Taliban, Kabul and *burqa* entered the media nomenclature as

words that described Afghanistan. From what I remember learning, the Taliban were evil people who ruled Afghanistan with a *Qur'an* in one hand and a rifle in the other; terrible men who wrapped their women in swaths of endless blue fabric so that Afghani females were faceless ghosts who floated aimlessly through the streets of Kabul. The fate of the women drew me in. As a devout follower of all things Susan B., Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Gloria Steinem, I knew that the treatment of the women of Afghanistan was wrong.

My mother and I tuned into either Dateline or 20/20 one night and watched a special on the women of Afghanistan. It explained how the Taliban used the religion of Islam to control its citizens, especially its women. Women were not allowed to work, leaving thousands of widows and their children without a way to procure income. I distinctly remember watching a young woman with her three children grinding up a cracker to share among the family, their dinner.

I began slowly accepting that military intervention could help the people of Afghanistan. If we could do something to end the tyrannical regime of the Taliban and improve the lives of Afghans and catch Osama bin Laden...then why not? Operation Enduring Freedom, I could wrap my head around that.

The Taliban lost Kabul on November 12, 2001. I kept the front page of the Houston Chronicle when I learned the news. The picture depicted U.S military alongside Afghani

civilians in a jeep, with victorious smiles. I was happy; I thought that now we could help improve the lives of those who live in Afghanistan.

Iraq 2003

And then we invaded Iraq. I was in seventh grade, a different person than I was a year prior. I was disenchanted with my country. We were still in Afghanistan, still discussing the war on terror, still hunting for Osama bin Laden. Yet, we were entering another Middle Eastern country. Had bin Laden hopped a couple of borders and made this country his home? What did we want and why were more innocent people forced to meet our mighty military hand?

My seventh grade Texas History teacher let us watch television as the announcements were being made that we were invading Iraq. I watched some of my classmates cheer-- happy to enter another war with the 'same enemy'. That'll teach 'em to mess with America!

Wait, I thought, the nation of Iraq was not behind the September 11th attacks. Al Qaeda was. That scary organization the news talked about, the leader of it was Osama bin Laden.

I was ashamed that my fellow classmates were applauding the actions of our government. I realize now how little I actually knew during this time period. Regretfully,

I was not as in tune with my surroundings and did not notice any backlash against Muslims or Arabs during this time period.

Salah Al Din was bad and so was the Ottoman Empire

I eventually entered high school and it was in my ninth grade World Geography class that would introduce me to the religion of Islam. We did a brief unit on religion and studied the three monotheistic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. With Islam, we learned the core beliefs of the religion, the five pillars that provided structure for the House of Islam. Luckily, my teacher did not express any sentiments about the religion being inherently violent.

I learned of the first instance of 9/11 backlash during my ninth grade year. I had a friend in my Spanish class of Sri Lankan descent who told me that he practiced Islam. I thought it was 'cool', but he said after 9/11 it was just the opposite. His family was quite well off, and active members in the community, but this did not make them immune from the anti-Muslim backlash. He told me that his garage and his parent's cars had all be vandalized shortly after the attacks on 9/11. The words 'Terrorist', 'rag head', and 'go home' were painted on the cars and garage door. Even though his family was not Arab nor expressed any sympathy for the terrorists, they 'looked the part' with their dark skin and religious tendencies. This act has always left an imprint on me, knowing that my home town was capable of such ugly sentiments.

I refer to 9th-11th grade as the Lost Years, a dark mark in my psyche as I truly let my environment make of me a product of its small town and rather narrow minded views. This was a time period where my friends and I would only watch Fox News, and I even bought an Ann Coulter book (I know). I started listening to the views of my friend's parents. Normally, I would have cast them aside as the views of the crazy, but for some reason I listened. Perhaps I was rebelling against my liberal parents by becoming more conservative, a little Michael J. Fox a la Family Ties was what I was going for. Although I never really felt that I believed everything 'being conservative' called for, I constantly questioned what that news channel told me. But for the sake of blending into my high school, I went with it.

My thirst for knowledge of the Middle East was unquenchable despite my party realignment. Sadly though, I attended a public school in Texas that was not keen on delving into the history of the Middle East. The only time the Middle East was mentioned was during the Crusades and the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Both topics were negatively discussed, portraying those from the East as enemies of the West. When we studied the Crusades, the Muslim warrior Salah al Din conquered and took back the city of Jerusalem for Muslims. He took the holy city from the Christians and allowed Christians, Muslims and Jews to practice their religion freely, side by side! The horror! Next we learned of the backward Ottomans who dared challenge the Allies in World War I, suffered defeat, and watched as their empire fell into the hands of European powers. These two brief blips of the Middle East were the

apex of my education on the Middle East in World History. Yes, even in World History, an important region of the world was largely ignored.

My senior year of high school was a time of decisions. I decided against applying to the University of Texas, my dream school, in favor of Texas A&M University. I would rather not discuss what made me change my loyalty so quickly, let us just say it was male and I thought I could not live without it. Turns out I can.

Now that I had determined my school, I now needed to decide my major. My mother wanted me to go into science and study nursing. It was a practical job that would provide job security and enable me to take care of myself.

An internship at a hospital's OB/GYN department and a glance at a nursing degree plan that made me burst into tears at the lack of history and English classes ended that dream quickly. I applied as a history major and was accepted.

National Geographic at 6:00 AM

An early morning at work would change my major for the third time. My high school job was none too glamorous, working as a cashier at my local grocery store.

I always managed to get the very early morning shifts that began at six in the morning. Since most sane people do not begin their grocery shopping that early, six to eight was

my time. I picked up the latest National Geographic, there was an article entitled “Bethlehem, 2007 A.D”.

I turned the pages to find walls. Photograph after photograph of Palestinians in Bethlehem who were forced to cross check points daily, forced to walk in the shadow of a large gray wall that snaked through their homeland, suffocating the land and its inhabitants.

These images helped my heart conquer the logical reasoning of my mind. I did not want to study history; I wanted to study the Middle East. I decided to finally give in to my curiosity and study the Middle East and the Arabic language. Upon my official acceptance, I changed my major from History to International Studies. Walls are meant to fall-physical and mental. I wanted to break down the cultural wall that had divided me from a region that needed to be learned about.

At my new student orientation, my mother and I sat in Rudder Tower, arguing about which language I would take that fall. She wanted me to take French, I do not believe she was too keen on my taking Arabic once she learned I would have to study abroad in the Middle East.

French she said. Arabic said I, circling Arabic on my degree plan sheet. She consented, but said that if I did not make an ‘A’ in Arabic at the end of the fall semester, I would have to switch to French.

Arabic 101

She was veiled, and had a pleasant round face that smiled at the students filing into the classroom. First day of Arabic, and ironically our class was held in the Military Science Building. There was a photograph on the wall of a tank blowing up a desert landscape.

This did not seem to faze our professor as she welcomed us.

“مكيلي ع ماسل ا” (As-Salamu ‘Alaykum),” she greeted.

Peace be upon you.

“ماسل ا مكيلي عو” (Wa ‘Alaykum As-Salaam)” we were told to respond.

And upon you, Peace.

Peace. Not terror, not hate upon you. Peace.

She passed out name tags she had created for us, with our names in Arabic.

ن ايلي ج

Jillian. I analyzed the curves and dots of each carefully constructed letter that spelled out my not so extraordinary name. Yet, with these characters, it became art, became exceptional.

ن ايلي ج, ن ايلي ج, ن ايلي ج.

I embraced my new identity and fell in love with Arabic. I spent many hours that semester in the library learning my *alif's*, my *baa's*, my *taa's* and the other twenty-five characters that composed the Arabic Alphabet. I would often study between the rows of books containing information about the Middle East; running my hands along the spines of beautiful calligraphy, wishing that the wisdom and perfect Arabic grammar that tome contained would transfer to me by osmosis.

Not only did I receive an 'A' that semester, but was told by my professor that I was one of the best in the class. I ended my freshman year with a passion for what I was studying. I will not bore the reader with my sophomore year, for it was mostly more Arabic, more classes about the Middle East and planning my study abroad in Jordan for Summer 2010. It was an anxious year that taxed my patience as I counted down to the trip I had been waiting two years to make.

When I would return home for summers and winters, I worked as a barista at a Starbucks. It was here I learned that even those who had attended college, those on the upper echelon of society can harbor negative sentiments about what I was studying.

Non-fat latte with an extra shot of racism

Up to this point, my narrative has been chronological, but now I must discuss the events that transpired during Summer 2009, Winter 2009, Summer 2010 and Summer 2011, for my customers left me with such great gems to share with the world.

I worked in a relatively wealthy area where my customers were all members of the local country club, drove very nice cars, knew each other and came in everyday (sometimes twice a day) to purchase their overpriced coffee concoctions.

I had gotten to know the regulars quite well and they would ask about my studies. When I told them I studied Arabic and the Middle East, I received a grab-bag of responses.

“Are you learning it because you want to convert to Islam?”

“Oh, the language the terrorists speak?”

Yes, actually I converse with *Al Qaeda* on a daily basis; we send emails back and forth--really great language practice.

Some would say positive things but the reaction was mostly negative. The biggest collection of negative responses I recorded occurred during the three weeks I worked before my departure to Jordan. I have identified the customer by a drink (not necessarily theirs) to protect their identities.

Extra Foam Latte said, “Please do not come back Muslim. You know all Arabs hate the Jews? Israel is Jewish land! So Arabs should stop hating them.”

Venti Frappe said, “You’re going to be with Muslims ALL summer?! You know my husband and I went to the movies the other night and we saw these girls wearing those things on their heads. I yelled at them saying, ‘We’re in America! Take those things off!’”

Breve Latte said, “Please go to Petra! I hear it’s beautiful!” (This customer was more open minded and adventurous. I needed to include this response so not all my customers came across as ignorant.

The majority said something along the lines of be careful, you know they hate us and many begged for me to not convert to Islam.

Apparently studying abroad would make me immediately drop Catholicism in favor of Islam. It is a shame really that I became more in touch with my Catholic roots during my trip abroad instead of converting as they all expected.

When I returned to my caffeinated customers this past summer I was greeted with: “Oh my God you’re alive! No car bombs or suicide bombs go off around you?” and “Oh, so you didn’t convert!?”

Extra Foam Latte was back with more comments upon learning I had a new boyfriend. When I said he was of Arab descent, Extra Foam Latte's usual joking demeanor changed.

“You need to get out of that relationship. Now, before he hurts you.”

What? This customer had never met my boyfriend, yet had a preconceived judgment once the ethnicity of my boyfriend was revealed.

“He has a temper and I bet he'll hurt you, oppress you, and try to convert you.”

A young man this customer had never met, never seen, was, in his eyes, a threat to me. Things between my boyfriend at the time of this comment were spectacular (still are), not once have I been afraid his ethnicity would mutate his disposition and turn him into Evil Arab-Boyfriend who wanted a mute, obeying girl. Convert me? To what? Something I already was, Christian?

This customer would ask me every time he came in if I was “still dating THE Arab”.

When I would say yes, he would shake his head at me. I have since stopped working there seasonally (*Al-hamdilallah*, Thank God!) but now my younger sister makes his Extra Foam Latte. She says he still asks if I am “still dating THE Arab”, and has advised my sister to tell me to break up with him.

I think I will use my judgment on this one, but thanks for the tip Extra Foam Latte.

My favorite response to my studies and future career plan came from Venti Skinny Latte. This customer asked what I wanted to do with my studies and I responded that after obtaining my PhD I wanted to be a journalist with *Al Jazeera*. Skinny Latte almost choked on the sip he had taken. He laughed and said,

“Al Jazeera? I guess I’ll see you on You Tube in ten years getting your head cut off”.

Guess who got whole milk instead of non-fat milk the next morning.

My experience at Starbucks not only taught me to make a mean latte with perfect milk to foam ratio, but of the dominant views of the Middle East and Islam by everyday Americans. I viewed the area I lived in as a microcosm of America. I know it is not proper research technique as my sample was of convenience, but my customers were not uneducated people. They were very smart, very well off, yet so uninformed of the region I study. It was as if they were trying to educate me, that the books and journals I read were misinformation and the real Middle East and Islam was what was portrayed in the media. I do not fault them, although I wish they would have further educated themselves after 9/11 instead of eating up what Fox News told them. It must be difficult to paint a different image of the Middle East if the original piece is tarnished by our media and society’s preconceived notions of the region.

The point of this anecdote illustrate one I will make later, that we have become fearful of the unknown, and yet many would rather not learned because then we would humanize the enemy and realize our earlier assumptions were wrong. We would be wrong in our hypothesis that ALL Muslims and Arabs hate us.

My customers came across as those who believed it was ‘too soon’ after 9/11 to educate themselves on Islam and the Middle East. They have chosen to remain in the dark, in favor of ignorance and the blue light of the television screen.

On Jordan

Despite the warnings of my knowledgeable customers, I was excited to travel to Amman, Jordan during the summer of 2010. For three months, I would be studying Arabic at the University of Jordan’s Language Institute. My parents were visibly nervous as they helped me check in my luggage at the Qatar Airways kiosk.

It must not have been easy, watching their first born ascend the escalator to a flight that would take me to the Middle East. Perhaps if I had been traveling with faculty or to Europe it would have been easier. But no, I was traveling with friends to a Middle Eastern country without a real plan, just an ‘*inshallah*’ (God Willing) attitude that all would fall into place when I landed. I boarded the plane with no trepidation, the adventure I had planned was about to take flight.

After fourteen hours, full of movies and my first underage and public cocktail, we had landed in Doha, Qatar. I had seventeen hours to kill thanks to a layover and spent five of it in an uncomfortable chair before learning the airline provided a hotel for those with long lay overs. I was transported via shuttle to my hotel. It was humid and dusty and the hotel room looked like it had not been updated since the 1990s, with its non-flat screen, clunky television and dated air conditioning unit, but I slept peacefully knowing that the next day, I would be in Amman, Jordan.

Amman was beautiful was from the air, spots of greenery and mountains made up the landscape from my window. The moment I stepped out of the airport in the cool, Mediterranean breeze I was greeted with the Call to Prayer.

ربكأ هللا

هللا الةل ال نأ دةشأ

هللا لوسر ادمحم نأ دةشأ

ةالصلا لىع يح

حالفلا لىع يح

ربكأ هللا

هللا الةل ال

Allahu Akbar, ah-hadu al-la ilaha illa llah. Ash hadu anna Muhammadar Rasululaah.

Hayya ala salah. Yaay Ala l-Falah. Allahu Akbar, la ilaha illa-Allah.

[God is great. I bear witness that there is no god but God. I believe that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Come to prayer, come to success! God is great! There is no god, but God.]

I could write a novel about my summer in Jordan (hopefully I will someday) but it needs to be understood that it was the best summer of my twenty-two years. I was surrounded by a culture I loved and my level of comfort and lack of culture shock reaffirmed that I had made the right decision in studying Arabic and the Middle East. I have included a few anecdotes of the people who impacted me that summer.

No mom and dad, it will not be used solely as a center piece

My first purchase was an *argheela* (hookah) or water pipe. We went to the *Balad*, or ‘old city’, the more traditional shopping area. I bargained with the young man who worked at Downtown Smoke Shop and happily spent eighty dollars on a beautiful, three foot tall water pipe, lemon and mint flavored tobacco and all the other accoutrements that came with it. The young man who sold me my hookah never forgot me. I would return to that shop throughout the summer, speaking Arabic with him and was treated the antithesis of how everyone back home expected an Arab man to treat a woman. He respected me; not once did I feel uncomfortable in his shop. I would ask for a dinar’s worth of sheesha (flavored tobacco), about a $\frac{1}{4}$ of a kilo and would receive $\frac{1}{2}$ kilo in return, and he never allowed me to give him more than a dinar.

Sandals

I bought sandals from a king man in a poorer area of Amman. I purchased two pairs for five dinar as well as a free Arabic lesson. He asked about my family back home, what I wanted to do in Jordan that summer and he bought me a cold 7UP while we talked. I had friends who lived in that neighborhood, and they told me that every time he would see them, he would ask ‘*Kayf binat?*’, How’s the girl? The girl he was referring to was me. We talked once, and he remembered me for the rest of the summer.

Coffee

One night, I received a cab ride home from a man named Ali. It was a far ride and after 11:00 PM the fares double. He asked me where I was from and bought me coffee mid-ride. We had a lovely conversation about my summer and when we finally reached my stop, he refused to let me pay for the fare.

Pistachios

Unlike my friends who were also abroad with me, I never experienced a bad cab ride. My cab drivers were always friendly and fair. One night, I got into the cab of a man who told me he had to stop for pastries for his kids on the ride home. Since we were passing the shop en route to my apartment, I told him I didn’t mind. When he returned to the cab, he handed me a beautiful cookie filled with pistachios.

More coffee

I bought a traditional dress for my sister at a shop in the Balad. The shop owner and his friends made me sit in the shop and practice Arabic with them. We talked for thirty minutes and the owner sent his friend to bring us coffee while we chatted. He loved my Arabic and appreciated the purchase I had made in his shop. I wish the stores I shopped at in America would bring me coffee every time I bought a dress from them.

Islam

The only time religion was ever discussed between myself and an Arab while I was in Jordan occurred during another cab ride (I feel my novel will be entitled, Cabbies in Jordan at the rate I'm going). A Call to Prayer occurred during this cab ride. The driver asked what I thought of it. I said it was *jameel*-beautiful. It really was, I loved hearing it five times a day and did not mind being awoken by it in the middle of the night. The driver looked at me in his rear view mirror, asking if I really thought it was beautiful. Wallah! I responded. An expression meaning, I promise, I mean it, really! He grinned and simply said *Shukran*, thank you. He was clearly amazed that his American passenger had something positive to say about his religion. As I mentioned, this was the closest a Jordanian and I ever got to talking about religion. He did not try to convert me during that cab ride. Take that Starbucks customers!

Diet Cokes and Palestine

I wore, and still wear a bracelet depicting the Palestinian flag. I would often go to the McDonald's at one of the malls in Amman for my Diet Cokes because they actually used ice AND gave free refills. A foreign concept in this foreign country. The cashier, a young woman, glanced at my bracelet and said, "Why do you wear this?" and I would respond that I supported Palestine. "But you're American." She refuted, surprised at my response. I am the exception I suppose. I learned that she was from Palestine and loved seeing an American support her country. She remembered me each time I came in there for my Diet Cokes.

Donuts and orange soda

My apartment did not have internet, the building 'commandeered' it from the café down the street. Unfortunately, the network 'Shaharazad' did not work well on my computer. I would walk down the street to another café called Planet Donut. It had exceptionally prepared donuts and expertly brewed hazelnut flavored coffee. The cashier was a kind, young, Egyptian man with a carefully manicured mustache. He was welcoming and knew my order--a Miranda. A Miranda was a refreshing orange soda far better than Fanta or Sunkist and the label claimed it contained 100% Vitamin C! He would have one waiting for me every night. Once they had run out, and he marched next door and purchased one for me from a neighboring shop.

Copyright does not exist in Jordan

Apparently there are no such things as copy right laws in Jordan. I noticed that the first day when the DVD shops that were on every corner did not sell real DVDs, but burned ones, some even movies that had just come out in theaters. I needed to purchase the next book for my Arabic language study and heard of a copy story that would make it for me for a fraction of the actual cost. I went to the store and the Egyptian man who ran it. As my book was copying, he told me he was an engineer from Egypt who had moved to Jordan in hopes he could find a job, but he was stuck working in a copy shop until he could obtain residency. He drew a map of Egypt and showed me where his home town was. I drew a map of Texas and drew a dot where Houston was located. He loved the interesting shape of Texas and laughed as I struggled to draw it. He gave me an Arabic lesson as well. When my book was finished being illegally copied, he refused to accept payment for it. I left his shop with a free, fifty dollar book.

My Middle East

Those stories are brief glimpses of the hundreds I have from that summer. It is important to tell these tales to humanize the people I lived with for three months. Arabs, predominately Muslims who not once made me feel hated because I was American. When I would say I was American, the only bad thing ever said was that they did not approve of the politics of America and they were not the biggest fans of “Dubyah”. They made it clear that it was the politics they did not like, but they loved the American

people. They would rave about how the Americans they met were kind and happy people.

I would return to my beloved Texas A&M that fall to find that anti-Arab and Muslim sentiment had not disappeared during my travels.

Remember that one time I was conservative?

When I returned to College Station my junior year, I made a personal goal to educate my peers about the summer I had spent in the Middle East and how the Muslims and Arabs I met did not reflect the terrible stereotype that this country envisions of them.

Unfortunately, an organization who wished to educate the student body about 'Islam' beat me to that lesson. During the month of October, an organization on this campus began a month long campaign of education the campus of the dangers of Islam, and how Sharia law was threatening the United States. The following fliers (Figures 1, 2 and 3) were distributed by this organization.

Islam: Oppression of Women

**"I was shown the Hell-fire and that the majority of its dwellers were women."
- Muhammad**

(Sahih Bukhari: Volume 1, Book 2, Number 28)



The Qur'an instructs men to beat disobedient wives: **"admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them"** (Qur'an 4:34)

Unlike many of the religions you are familiar with, Islam is a political and military system. It is not just a religion.

- The Qur'an teaches that **"Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other."** (Qur'an 4:34)
- Islam allows men to **marry four wives and have sex with slave girls.** (Qur'an 4:3)
- **"When a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this, and he pointed to her face and hands."** - Muhammad (Sunan Abu-Dawud: Book 32, Number 4092)
- Muhammad says a woman is worth half a man's testimony because **"of the deficiency of a woman's mind."** (Sahih Bukhari: Volume 3, Book 48, Number 826)
- **"Honour" killings are carried out on women** by men who assume that their wives, daughters or sisters behave in a way which damages a man's "honour". (Amnesty International)
- **Over 90% of married women report being kicked, slapped, beaten or sexually abused** when husbands were dissatisfied by their cooking or cleaning, or when the women had 'failed' to bear a child or had given birth to a girl instead of a boy. (Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences)
- **Female genital mutilation is common in Iraq.** (AINA)

An Islamic woman being punished to death by stoning.



Figure 1, Islam: Oppression of Women. (Courtesy of Texas Aggie Conservatives)

Fundamental Islam: Deceiving the Infidel

Taqiyya: The Islamic doctrine allowing fundamentalist Muslims to deceive non-Muslims in order to advance Islam.

These are the truths you're not supposed to know!



"Freedom of Expression is Western Terrorism"

"We smile in the face of some people although our hearts curse them."

-Abu Ad-Darda (Muhammad's disciple)

Unlike many of the religions you are familiar with, Islam is a political and military doctrine. It is not just a religion.

"Taqiyya is of fundamental importance in Islam.

Practically every Islamic sect agrees to it and practices it ... We can go so far as to say that **the practice of taqiyya is mainstream in Islam**, and that those few sects not practicing it diverge from the mainstream ... **Taqiyya is very prevalent in Islamic politics, especially in the modern era."**

-Sami Makarem, American University of Beirut

Muhammad (Allah's Apostle) permits deception to facilitate murder:

Allah's Apostle said, "Who is willing to kill Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf who has hurt Allah and His Apostle?" Thereupon Muhammad bin Maslama got up saying, "O Allah's Apostle! **Would you like that I kill him?**" **The Prophet said, "Yes,"** Muhammad bin Maslama said, "**Then allow me to say a (false) thing (i.e. to deceive Kab).**" **The Prophet said, "You may say it."** (Sahih Bukhari: Volume 5, Book 59, Number 369)

Islam teaches that Allah is the best deceiver:

"And they (the disbelievers) schemed, and Allah schemed (against them); and **Allah is the best of schemers.**" - Quran 3:54

Three types of lies are permitted in fundamental Islam:

1. Lies to allow reconciliation between believers
2. Lies to your spouse
3. Lying in war or to the unbeliever

(Sahih Muslim Book 32, Number 6303)

"Let not the believers take disbelievers for their

friends in preference to believers. Whoso doeth that hath no connection with Allah unless (it be) that ye but guard yourselves against them, taking (as it were) security. Allah biddeth you beware (only) of Himself. Unto Allah is the journeying." (Quran 3:28)

Figure 2, Deceiving the Infidel. (Courtesy of Texas Aggie Conservatives)

Fundamentalist Islam: Intolerance and Hatred of Non-Muslims

"Fight those who do not believe in Allah, ... nor follow the religion of truth, ... until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection." (Quran 9:29)



Unlike many of the religions you are familiar with, Islam is a political and military doctrine. It is not just a religion.

We must educate ourselves so we can **protect basic human rights and empower moderate Muslims to reform violent and oppressive aspects of fundamentalist Islam.** You owe it to yourself to learn more about Islam.

"Then **fight and slay the Pagans** wherever ye find them, and **seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them** in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent...then open the way for them..." (Quran 9:5)

"Muhammad was asked, "What is the best deed?" He replied, "To believe in Allah and Muhammad. The questioner then asked, "What is the next best? He replied, "To participate in Jihad in Allah's Cause." (Sahih Bukhari 2:26)

Choices for non-muslims:

- 1.) **Accept Islam**
- 2.) **Pay the jizya**, a protection tax, much like that collected by a mob to insure safety.
- 3.) **Go to war with Muslims.** (Sahih Muslim 19:4294)



• "The vilest of animals in Allah's sight are those who **disbelieve.**" (Quran 8:55)

• Quran 2:65 describes non-muslims as "**apes, despised and hated**".

Total Number of Islamic
Terrorist Attacks Since 9/11
Worldwide:

16,335

(<http://www.thereigionofpeace.com>)

Figure 3, Fundamentalist Islam. (Courtesy of Texas Aggie Conservatives)

This organization was trying to educate me about the religion I was surrounded by for three months. These fliers display quotes taken out of context from the *Qur'an* and random *Hadith* (the sayings of the prophet Mohammad), all claiming and enforcing the stereotype that Islam was a repressive, violent religion and was a threat to America.

This 'information' was stemming from people who did not study Islam, probably had never been to a Muslim country, and they were attempting to warn this campus of the impending dangers of Islam. There are many Muslims and Arabs who attend this university; clearly these fliers ostracized an already marginalized community on campus. I was furious. I even attempted to talk to the group's president about these misleading fliers, but was met with a stubborn attitude that asserted the fliers contained factual information and that I should pick up the *Qur'an* once and a while and 'really educate myself' about the terrible religion of Islam.

Why was this necessary? I could not understand why anyone would want to ostracize fellow Aggies simply because of religion. This event heightened my senses to the culture of my campus and made me wonder how the Muslims of my campus felt about those fliers. A&M's reputation is not one of stellar acceptance of diversity, the conservative image is known at a national level (Huffington Post Top 10 College Campuses With Conservative Student Body). I will admit that it has become increasingly more tolerant since my arrival in 2008, but it has been a slow process. The latter part of this research project delves into the experiences of Muslims and Arabs on this campus. First-hand

accounts of their experience after 9/11. I wanted to research what it was like to attend a campus that let this student organization continue to pass out their defaming fliers because of 'free speech'. It was hate speech passed out about members of the Aggie family, not exactly the 'world's friendliest' campus.

The Kingdom

My final story that concludes my journey, for this paper at least, is one that inspired the title of this project. For the Winter of 2010, I was awarded a fellowship through the National Council on U.S-Relations and the Saudi Arabian Government. For two and a half weeks, I would travel the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with ten other young women from all over the United States. A free trip to one of those misunderstood countries in the Middle East? I was excited, my parents had to yet again watch their daughter board a plane destined to the Middle East.

Our delegation had the extraordinary and rare opportunity to meet members of the Saudi government and the royal family, and discuss important issues facing that country and our own. We also toured many universities throughout the country and talked to women our age.

At the oldest university in the country, we were having a question & answer session before our tour. They would ask us about universities in America and we would ask about their studies in Saudi. It was a welcome opportunity to dialogue with young

women about the Kingdom. A young woman with short hair stood up and asked a question that would forever impact the rest of my college career.

“Not all Arabs and Muslims supported the attacks on 9/11. We do not approve of what they did at all! Why then, do they [Americans] hate us?”

Her question made me think back to the incident I had with that student organization. No wonder they assumed we hated, if a recognized student organization was allowed to freely pass out pamphlets that misled the student body to think pessimistically about the religion of those hijackers and Osama bin Laden. This ends my narrative. I still continue to write it, for my experience with the Middle East will continue as my studies have defined the future course I will take. The Arabs and Muslims I have met along the way have greatly influenced my opinion the Middle East and the region of Islam. I have not had lunch with *Hamas*, *Al Qaeda* or *Hezbollah*, I do not have any firsthand accounts of their opinions of Americans. But I do have a wealth of narratives of the Arabs and Muslims I know: everyday people who resent that their distinct and individual personalities are ignored because the stereotypes of these groups are relentless and powerful in American society. But I believe that is enough about me.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

To garner information and data for this research project, simple methods were employed due to the nature of this research. Since it was mostly interview based instead of experiments, journalistic methods of interviews and data gathering were used.

The first step to tackling the aforementioned questions was to gather literature regarding the post 9/11 experience of Arabs, Muslims and non-Arab/Muslim Americans. Books, academic journals and polls were consulted for this process. I focused on books and scholarly articles published after 2001, with the exception of the works by Edward Said.

The next method utilized is the small amount of interviews with Arabs, Muslims and non-Arab/Muslim Americans. This is where methods such as interviews were utilized.

The interviews are one on one with the researcher.

Predetermined interview questions were created and asked during one-on-one interviews. A tape recorder as well as a note book was used to record the answers. The tape recorder was used in order to prevent any inaccuracies or heresy during the interview. Exact responses were recorded in order to receive the most exact and accurate information that was given by the interviewee. The responses in these interviews will help answer the question asked of all the groups, "Why Do They Hate Us?".

The following interview questions were developed. Snow balling (following up to the response of the interviewee) was another method used if the interviewee's response prompted a different question from the researcher.

Questions for Muslims (Arab/Non-Arab):

1. *Tell me about what you remember from September 11, 2001. Where you were, what you were thinking.*
2. *Where is your family originally from?*
3. *Tell me your experience with the religion of Islam*
4. *What has been your experience as a Muslim post 9/11? Cite any specific instances of prejudice and any events where you experienced this.*
5. *What do you think most Americans think/believe about the religion of Islam?*

Questions for non-Muslim Arabs:

1. *Tell me about what you remember from September 11, 2001. Where you were, what you were thinking.*
2. *Where is your family originally from?*
3. *What has been your experience post-9/11 in America? Cite any instances of prejudice and any events where you experienced this.*
4. *What do you think most Americans think about you and your identity as an Arab.*

CHAPTER III

THE MUSLIM AND ARAB EXPERIENCE

That September day

Black smoke billowed from gaping wounds caused by jets. The once proud World Trade Center towers that defined the New York City skyline ceased to exist by the end of the Tuesday. Americans sat, glued to their television, clutching their families as they watched their country being attacked. Who could have flown those American planes into American buildings, the World Trade Center and Pentagon, and an American field in Pennsylvania? The nation was shaken, from an unknown and faraway foe that attacked in cold blood and killed 3,000 innocent Americans. Luckily, the enemy was determined quickly, Muslim extremists from the Middle East were responsible for those attacks. We had a new enemy to rally against, but instead of being angry at the minority, our grief and anger blinded us to blame the majority of Muslims, Arabs and those who ‘looked like terrorists’. In the days, the months and years that followed the tragic events of 9/11, the lives of Arabs and Muslims in America changed. No longer were they a minority group, but they were *the* minority group, the new enemy. They became the punching bags for grieving Americans who could not differentiate between those who were the problem, extremists like Osama bin Laden, and those who lived peacefully and proudly in America. This paper will delve into the post 9/11 experience of Muslims and Arabs in the United States and how the lack of education about the Middle East and Islam contributes to the predominate stereotypes of those groups in American culture. How

many Americans asked a Muslim or Arab, “Are you okay?” in the days that followed, or was the question more along the lines of “Why did you do this?” The experience of the groups who have bared the brunt of the repercussions of September 11th cannot be ignored or justified any longer.

The days that followed

Once the nation had determined that it was terrorists who had committed those acts of violence and hatred on September 11, Arab terrorists acting in the name of Islam, Muslims in the United States reacted differently than the ones shown on our television screens. They immediately condemned the actions of those responsible and asserted their loyalty to the country they also loved, the United States of America.

After the attacks, Muslims placed flowers and cards outside of the Muslim Council Center mosque in Washington, D.C., where a large American flag hung in the entrance to the building. In Paterson New Jersey, Muslims hoisted a banner on Main Street proclaiming that “The Muslim Community Does No Support Terrorism.” All across the country, mosques and Islamic centers flew the American flag and opened their doors to non-Muslims. Seeking to educate their non-Muslim neighbors about Islam, and reassure their loyalty to the United States and their love of the American Dream (Curtis 2009, 98).

It was as if they knew there would be backlash against their communities, and tried to prevent it by publicly declaring their condemnation of the attacks and attempting to show other Americans that their religion accepted such violent acts.

Religious scholars and leaders around the world issued official statements condemning the actions of *Al Qaeda*. The Fiqh Council of North America, a council of Islamic

scholars that, “advises and educates its members and officials on matters related to the application of *Shariah* in their individual and collective lives in the North American environment” (Fiqh Council 2005), issued a *fatwa* against terrorism and the acts on 9/11. A *fatwa* is “a ruling on a point of Islamic law that is given by a recognized authority” (dictionary.com), a statement that uses the *Qur’an* and *Hadith* to justify the decisions made in the fatwa. It is issued by Muslim scholars who study the *Qur’an* and *Shariah* Law.

The Fiqh Council of North America wishes to reaffirm Islam's absolute condemnation of terrorism and religious extremism.

Islam strictly condemns religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism. Targeting civilians' life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is haram – or forbidden - and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not "martyrs."

The Qur'an, Islam's revealed text, states: "Whoever kills a person [unjustly]...it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved all mankind." (Qur'an, 5:32)

Prophet Muhammad said there is no excuse for committing unjust acts: "Do not be people without minds of your own, saying that if others treat you well you will treat them well, and that if they do wrong you will do wrong to them. Instead, accustom yourselves to do good if people do good and not to do wrong (even) if they do evil." (Al-Tirmidhi)

God mandates moderation in faith and in all aspects of life when He states in the Qur'an: "We made you to be a community of the middle way, so that (with the example of your lives) you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind." (Qur'an, 2:143)

In another verse, God explains our duties as human beings when he says: "Let there arise from among you a band of people who invite to righteousness, and enjoin good and forbid evil." (Qur'an, 3:104)

Islam teaches us to act in a caring manner to all of God's creation. The Prophet Muhammad, who is described in the Qur'an as "a mercy to the worlds" said: "All

creation is the family of God, and the person most beloved by God (is the one) who is kind and caring toward His family."

In the light of the teachings of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* we clearly and strongly state:

1. All acts of terrorism targeting civilians are haram (forbidden) in Islam.
2. It is haram for a Muslim to cooperate with any individual or group that is involved in any act of terrorism or violence.
3. It is the civic and religious duty of Muslims to cooperate with law enforcement authorities to protect the lives of all civilians.

We issue this fatwa following the guidance of our scripture, the Qur'an, and the teachings of our Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him. We urge all people to resolve all conflicts in just and peaceful manners.

We pray for the defeat of extremism and terrorism. We pray for the safety and security of our country, the United States, and its people. We pray for the safety and security of all inhabitants of our planet. We pray that interfaith harmony and cooperation prevail both in the United States and all around the globe. (Fiqh Council 2005)

This fatwa, issued by those who are scholars on the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, officially condemned the violence committed by Osama bin Laden, and used quotes from the *Qur'an* to justify such decisions.

Charles Kurzman, a professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has written many books on the revitalization of Islam as well as Islamic terrorists.

On his website, he has an entire and rather lengthy page dedicated to Islamic statements against terrorism. It is a large collection from all around the world:

Shaykh Muhammed Sayyid al-Tantawi, imam of al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, Egypt: "Attacking innocent people is not courageous, it is stupid and will be punished on the day of judgement. ... It's not courageous to attack innocent children, women and civilians. It is courageous to protect

freedom, it is courageous to defend oneself and not to attack.” Agence France Presse, September 14, 2001

Muslim Brotherhood, an opposition Islamist group in Egypt, said it was “horrified” by the attack and expressed “condolences and sadness”: “[We] strongly condemn such activities that are against all humanist and Islamic morals. ... [We] condemn and oppose all aggression on human life, freedom and dignity anywhere in the world.” Al-Ahram Weekly Online, 13 – 19 September 2001

President Muhammad Khatami of Iran: “[T]he September 11 terrorist blasts in America can only be the job of a group that have voluntarily severed their own ears and tongues, so that the only language with which they could communicate would be destroying and spreading death.” Address to the United Nations General Assembly, November 9, 2001 (Kurzman 2012).

There are hundreds more listed on the website of Islamic and Arab leaders from all over the world, from the United States to Saudi Arabia even Pakistan. All of them, condemn the actions of those who claimed to be acting in the name of Islam. All of these scholars, leaders, activists refuted this proclamation. Terrorism and the killing of innocent people was not and never will be accepted in the religion of Islam.

However, many Americans must not have read these statements or *fatwas*, because Muslims and Arabs in America are still being told that their religion condones such actions. Jim Zogby writes of his experience of a lecture he gave at the one year anniversary of the attacks. He was giving a speech in Rockefeller Center in New York with families of those who had perished on 9/11. In his lecture he explained that there was no justification for such actions and that Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans

had died in the attacks as well, and those groups were equally shaken that September day. However, he says:

Two audience members kept asking: Why can't you Arabs just condemn what happened and not try to justify it? No amount of repetition could get my message across. Most people understood, but in their pain and fear, some had simply stopped listening (Zogby 2010, 12)

Muslims and Arabs have been asked to condemn those acts, and have answered the call with the fatwa released as well as the statements made by scholars and leaders around the world. However, in our grief from losing loved ones, images and stereotypes engrained in us as a society were more apparent and powerful. A different medium, not dialogue or statements of condemnation, the media, reached many Americans first that day and even the days before September 11, 2001. Stereotypes and misconceptions of a people, culture and religion were demonized even before the attacks, and more pilloried after.

How Muslims and Arabs are portrayed

As stated before, the United States had determined by the end of that Tuesday who was responsible for the attacks. An *Al Qaeda* cell headed by Osama bin Laden, an extremist Islamist organization had orchestrated the atrocities that killed thousands of people.

Arabs, acting in the 'name of Islam' hijacked four planes and flew them into pieces of our American infrastructure. Once we knew who had committed these heinous acts, we knew who to direct our anger toward; we had a tangible enemy to rally against.

The demonization and dehumanization of our enemy began. Just as Americans did with the Japanese in 1941, we pointed our fingers at an ethnic group, religious group and anyone who ‘fit the mold of a terrorist’. There was no distinction between extremists and peaceful American citizens who practiced the faith of Islam, who were of Arab descent or those who ‘looked’ like they belonged to those aforementioned groups.

It would be false to say that the demonization of these groups happened solely after 9/11; it intensified, but these groups have had marks on them even prior to the events in 2001 that put them in the spotlight, center stage in American society.

Pre 9/11 images of Arabs and Muslims in the United States

It is often said that America is a ‘proud’ nation of immigrants. Many Americans can trace their lineages back to a passage through Ellis Island. In school, we are told that the only true Americans are Native Americans (yes, the very same ones white settlers pushed the peripheries of this nation) and that we all came from somewhere else. Many cling to those identities, some of the strongest are Irish-American and Italian-American, and groups like these celebrate their heritage in many ways, though festivals, food and cultural practices.

Yet, if one digs deeper into the history of immigration, it was not always so simple of safe to assert one’s heritage.

The darker side of Ellis Island

White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant was the preferred identity in the early years of this nation. It was easy to blend into the fabric of American society if an immigrant could easily 'fit' into those features. Irish-Catholics were among the first to face the penalty of differing from the preferred immigrant mold.

The influx of Irish-Catholics occurred throughout the 19th century and many Americans feared it was a secret ploy by the Vatican to insert sleeper cell immigrants who would later claim America for the pope¹. Irish immigrants who had left their country in hopes of pursuing the American Dream were accused of having a hidden agenda for immigration to America. Their loyalty to America, because of their religion that not many Americans practiced, was put on trial. Their loyalty could only be steadfast to clergy in Italy and never to Washington D.C.

Other immigrant groups, such as Jewish immigrants and Chinese immigrants were viewed as groups who could never fully assimilate into American culture. Xenophobia is the term used to describe this phenomenon, the fear of foreigners. I do not believe it is an innate aspect of the American psyche, to hate or distrust immigrant groups. I am asserting that Americans fear what they do not know, and tend to favor sensationalist views and stereotypes instead of educating themselves about a group or religion. Americans fear also what they do not understand. Knowledge is a powerful tool that can break down cultural barriers. Unfortunately, as will be proven with the case of Arab or

Muslims immigrants, if something more pervasive and widespread beats an opportunity to learn free of bias and stereotypes, then it is harder to reconcile preconceived notions of a group of religion.

Orientalism

Edward Said, the preeminent scholar on the idea of Orientalism, was born in the Mandate of Palestine and grew up to see his homeland christened with a new name, Israel. Much of his work was dedicated to the plight of Palestine and advocating for a two-state solution and rights for the Palestinian people. His experiences reflected his work, and after the 1973 war in Israel, he began to see that the images and stereotypes he had observed growing up were caused by something deeper. Said realized that much literature and art that depicted the Middle East were contradictory to what he knew. In an interview for the University of Massachusetts he said:

[On the second impulse that contributed to his writing of *Orientalism*
The constant disparity I felt between what my experience of what being an Arab was, and the representations of that in art. And I'm talking about great artists! And great novelists, and the fact that those representations of the Orient had very little to do with what I knew of, my own background in life. So I decided to write the history of that (Said 1998).

The representations of the Orient, painted or written by Europeans during the Imperial Era were exaggerated representations of the world that Said grew up in. Said's groundbreaking book, *Orientalism*, analyzes the European (and briefly the American) experience in the Orient and the 'scholarly' and 'artistic' work that depicted the region.

These ‘great’ works of art and literature created stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs, and these stereotypes still persist today.

Orientalism or the Orient was created by Europeans as an exotic Other; the ‘Other’ being not the West, not the great civilized powers of the world. The Orient was full of mystery, of different, strange people, of harems and beautiful, sexually charged half-naked women, who were at the mercy of the men they were serving, of men who were barbaric and not quite civilized. In the interview, Said justifies these stereotypes when he notes:

And it seemed to me that there was a kind of repertory of images that kept coming up: The sensual woman who is there to be sort of used by the man, the East as a kind of mysterious place full of secrets and monsters, you know, “the marvels of the East,” was a phrase that was used. And the more I looked the more I saw that this was really quite consistent with itself. It have very little to do with people who had actually been there. . . In other words you didn't get what you could call realistic representations of the Orient, either in literature or in painting or in music or any of the arts. (Said 1998).

These stereotypes were not merely created for the purpose of artwork, they served a dual purpose. Said writes:

To believe that the Orient was created-or as I call it, “Orientalized” – and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony (Said 1979, 6).

Said’s idea focuses on the creation of the Orient, in order to justify colonization in the region and to create an ‘Other’ for Westerners to define themselves through. It was a ‘backward’ civilization that needed the white man to shed his bright light and bring with him modernity to this region shrouded in darkness.

Artwork and novels served as mediums for Europeans to convey this message; these were sent home to the mother land, showing the civilized people of Europe, the savages that lay East. *Orientalism* was a novel that came far before the events on September 11th, 2001. The stereotypes described by Said are embedded images in American society. The sensual yet repressed woman, the aggressive man, the holy war warrior, are all images that come to mind when the words Arab, Middle East or Islam come up. Said's book shows that the stereotypes still utilized in much of today's media have deep roots in the colonial/ imperial era of the world. It is a way to define the West through the exotic 'Other' in order to juxtapose the image of the West as a progressive, women friendly, liberal world with the timeless, backward, sensual Eastern world. However, it must be noted that some media outlets are improving in framing Muslims and Arabs in such stereotypes.

That darn media!

The media in this country has played a major role in producing stereotypes and misconceptions about the Middle East, especially Hollywood. Hollywood plays on the embedded stereotypes mentioned by Said when portraying Muslims, Arabs and the Middle East. Movies are a form of low popular culture easily accessible to the masses. They are entertaining, easy to understand and cheap (for the most part). They take much less time to absorb than reading a book or attending a lecture. If the only introduction the average American gets to the Middle East, Arabs and Muslims is through a Hollywood film, that image will remain as the only image that person has unless they decide to

education themselves better on the topic. Unfortunately, given the disparity of knowledge Americans have on Islam and the Middle East, it is clear many stick with the image the media paints for them.

In Jack Shaheen's scholarly work, "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People", 900 Hollywood movies were reviewed and analyzed in accordance to how Muslims and Arabs were portrayed. This article "is the most convincing evidence of deliberate vilifying of Arabs and Muslims by the movie industry," (Akram 2007, 184-195). In this work, Shaheen describes that the archetypes (rather, stereotypes) portrayed in these movies were, "villains, sheikhs, maidens, Egyptians and Palestinians. Arab women are portrayed primarily in two roles: weak and mute, covered in black or as scantily clad belly dancers," (2007, 187). Shaheen was only able to find Arabs or Muslims portrayed decently in 45 out of 900 films. Islam was also found to be shown in a negative light as well:

The religion was linked with holy war, male patriarchy and terrorism. Arab Muslims are shown as hostile invaders or lecherous oil sheikhs intent on using nuclear weapons. A far too common scene shows a mosque with Arabs at prayer, cutting away to showing civilians being gunned down (2007, 188).

A famous example of a film 'vilifying' Arabs or Muslims is the epic *Lawrence of Arabia*. This film tells the story of Englishman T.E Lawrence and his quest during World War I to unite the Arabs within the Arabian Peninsula in order to rebel against the Ottoman Empire. The film stars Sir Alec Guinness as King Faisal. Obi Won donned 'brown face' to play the rich Arab Sheikh. A white, not Arab, actor was selected to

portray the King. Other examples Shaheen discovered of ‘typical Arab stereotypes’ were: feuding, looting Arabs, unable to coexist. Another was the long soliloquy Lawrence delivers after the death of his friend, “Sherif Ali, so long as the Arabs fight tribe against tribe, so long will they remain a little people, a silly people, greedy, barbarous and cruel, as you are,” (Shaheen 2009, 315).

The film *Aladdin* is also rife with stereotypes. Its premise is innocent enough; poor beggar falls in love with beautiful princess, finds a magic lamp, defeats evil villain and gets the girl! Unfortunately the characters embody Orientalist characteristics. Aladdin is the desexualized male, who can only succeed by entering a ‘whole new world’, Jafar is the emasculated, yet sexually hungry, evil magician, the Sultan is the incompetent yet loveable ruler, and Jasmine is, to put it bluntly, the haram-a-rama-mama, the perfect Oriental female. In the mythical realm of Agrabah, a timeless Oriental dream still exists. Where the song that sets the tone for the land these characters lived in begins with:

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 our face
It’s barbaric! But hey, it’s home (Clements1992)

Other characteristics such as “dark hooded eyes and large hooked noses” and “all the bad guys have large bulbous noses, sister eyes, heavy accents, and they’re wielding swords constantly!” (Shaheen 2009, 57-58) are predominant images throughout the movie. Even a cartoon exhibits stereotypes of the Muslim and Arab worlds.

Not once in these 900 films are Arabs shown to be normal Americans with families and loved ones or active citizens. They are not given the luxury many other groups in cinema are awarded, the portrayal of a normal life without violence.

Shaheen's work was written before September 11, 2001 (with an updated edition in 2009). If those are the images many Americans had prior to the 9/11 attacks, it is almost understandable why many believed these stereotypes. Arabs and Muslims in the media were portrayed as violent and extreme, and here were real terrorist attacks that put weight to that stereotype.

Throughout the twentieth century, there were brief interactions with the Muslim and Arab Worlds that incurred the wrath of Americans to lash out at Muslim Americans and Arab Americans:

In the past, some Americans had physically and verbally assaulted Muslims and those who 'looked like Muslims' as a reaction to events overseas. After the 1973-1974 OPEC embargo of the United States, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the 1983 attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut, Muslim Americans had been harassed, beaten up, or threatened by their fellow citizens. (Curtis 2009, 99).

The stereotype at Muslims and Arabs are intrinsically linked with violence is demonstrated in the media frenzy after the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed:

The media gave space to rumors linking Arabs and Muslims to the attack. Less than two hours after the explosion, for example, former Oklahoma Congressman David McCurdy, echoing comments made on CBS-TV by a professional Muslim basher, 'terrorism expert' Steven Emerson

speculated that Muslims or another Middle Eastern group well have perpetrated the attack. There was, he noted, a large and active Middle Eastern community in Oklahoma known to support radical causes. He was flat out wrong; there has never been any evidence connecting Oklahoma's Arab American population to anything untoward. Further, side from superficial similarities to the bungled but still lethal 1993 World Trade Center bombing, there was simply no evident linking Al Qaeda or any other Islamic or Arab group to the crime (Zogby 2010, 13-14).

What a surprise it was when the nation learned that a white, Christian, U.S Army Veteran by the name of Timothy McVeigh was responsible for the attack. James Zogby, of Zogby Poll fame, explained that before learning it was not Muslim or Arab perpetrator, there was immediate backlash against the Arab American community. One Arab American woman residing in Oklahoma City called the Zogby office to "report an angry mob had gathered outside her home," (2010, 14).

An American journalist and feminist, Robin Morgan, wrote in an essay her memories of the backlash after the Oklahoma City Bombing:

A few years ago, in the 48 hours after the Oklahoma City bombing (right before it was discovered that the perpetrator was a white Christian right-wing male) three Arab-Americans were lynched in the Midwest of the US (Morgan 2003, 32-36).

The immediate assumption that it was Muslims or Arabs that were responsible for the bombing of the building in 1995, set off a quick burning fire of backlash against the Muslim and Arab community. While it was small in comparison to the backlash that would occur after 9/11, it is important to note. Some Americans were immediate to point the blame to those violent, terrible Arabs/Muslims; the 'other', the newest newcomers to

this country. Only they, who were an inherently violent people as history and the media have shown, could have committed such terrible crimes as the one on that April morning.

The power of stereotypes

One of the first images shown of Arabs on September 11, and the days that followed was of Arabs dancing in the streets. Many Americans will cite this footage as one that gives weight to the idea Arabs and Muslim universally supported the attacks on 9/11. Thomas Friedman's documentary, *The Roots of 9/11* used this image when showing a montage of clips from that day. It was an image of Palestinians in the streets of East Jerusalem dancing, cheering, children wrapped in the Palestinian flag, laughing and smiling at the news that America had been attacked.

This paper will not examine the track record of the United States' role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as it would take up far too much space, but one phrase to summarize said record: not so great. But many Americans use this image of smiling Arabs as one that proves Arabs and Muslims hate the United States of America.

If your enemy, someone who caused you great pain & anguish had gotten hurt, or 'smacked in the face', wouldn't you rejoice in some way? Wrap yourself in the colors of your country's flag and take to the streets cheering. Think that America is above such rejoice for revenge?

The night of May 2, 2011 ended one of the longest man hunts; this was the night America learned that the ultimate enemy, Osama bin Laden, was found and killed. A ten year long search was over and our enemy had received the ultimate smack in the face—death. Many Americans grabbed ‘Old Glory’ and took to the streets, cheering, drinking, singing, and dancing.

Says Maya Angelou, we are more alike, than we are unlike.

Many Americans noticed the Arabs in the spotlight on the news networks and noted how it distorted the image of other Arabs and Muslims. In a collection of essays written by feminists, Robin Morgan wrote:

As of this morning (first day after) the expected patriotic blabber and religious jargon had started, along with pundits and politicians issuing media clichés about beginning the healing process and seeking closure. Maddeningly, there have been frequently repeated airings of film clips of some Palestinian men in the West Bank celebrating the attack with laughter, dancing and ‘V’-signs. But unfortunately there have not been as frequently repeated press airings of Palestinian leaders, Arab leaders and leaders of the Arab American community deploring it; equal time has not been given—only once in 24 hours I have heard major media announce the official statement of the Muslim Community in the United States that heatedly denounced the attacks. (Morgan 2003, 34-35).

The media networks were far too focused on the sensationalist aspect of the attack, the ‘who to blame question’, that groups attempting to condemn such attacks were not fairly covered. Instead, the news focused on the reactions of a small group of people to frame the enemy in a way that it was easy to see why that ethnic and religious group was to blame for the cruel attacks.

The actions of Arabs who claimed to be acting in the name of Allah further marginalized the Arabs and Muslims in this country. They were stripped of their identity of American, guilty of sharing the same ethnicity or religion as those who had committed the attacks on September 11th. In the days that followed, the demonization of ‘the Other’ intensified. Many non-Muslim, non-Arab Americans turned against their neighbors, pointed their fingers and asked of those who fit the part, “Why did your people do this?”

When the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center crumbled into a nuclear winter like city scape, and part of the Pentagon outside of Washington D.C went up in flames on September 11th, news organizations reported soon thereafter that the perpetrators were Arabs & Muslims. Perfectly peaceful Arab and Muslim Americans as well as persons looking like them became victims of hate crimes and the stereotypical image of Muslims and Arabs as perpetrators of violence and terrorists. (Nacos 2006, 1)

The images of Muslims and Arabs before 9/11 remained in the back of many American minds as they watched the Towers fall, and further media coverage regarding Arabs and Muslims aided in the continuation of these stereotypes. “Stereotypes in the popular media are even more blatant. Bookstores in shopping malls only display books that show Muslims and Arabs in a negative light. Moderate books or books showing a different side to Arabs and Muslims have a harder time getting published” (Terry 2010, 148-159).

Sensationalism sells, and the frame the media often puts Arabs and Muslims behind the frame of the radical. The Gallup Poll, after 9/11 did polls specifically focusing on perception of Muslims and Arabs as well as polling the Arab and Muslim world about various issues. The Gallup Center for Muslim Studies did a content analysis of media

coverage of the Muslim world and found that “the media focused on a fringe minority of militant Muslims: 57% of the content analyzed focused on militant Muslims. Only a fraction 1% of the world’s 1.4 billion Muslims fall into the category of militant or radical. They are overrepresented in the news media verses their actual numbers. It creates the image of Muslims as violent people,” (Gallup 2009).

Another research director at the Gallup Institute says that “The West was looking at us through the lens that Osama bin Laden put on their eyes such content allows the voices of the worst elements of Islam to speak for the majority” (2009).

Another analyses conducted by the Gallup poll was on media images of women in the Arab and Muslim world. Seventy-five percent of the images or stories of women from Muslim world depicted them as passive victims. The majority of the media surrounding women from these groups focuses on the oppressed stereotype instead of displaying images of strong and independent Arab or Muslim women

The media tends to only focuses on these violent images, instead of portraying Muslims and Arabs as normal citizens. It is impossible for the Muslim community to break these stereotypes if a much more powerful force, such as the media, continues to enforce them by only focusing on the minority fringes of the society.

Islamophobia

“If you don’t love America and you don’t like the way we do things, I’ve got one thing to say — Get out!,” he proclaimed. “We don’t worship Buddha. I said we don’t worship Buddha. We don’t worship Mohammed. We don’t worship Allah. We worship God. We worship God’s son Jesus Christ.”-Pastor Dennis Terry, March 18, 2012

While the first amendment proudly proclaims that Americans have the freedom of religion, and children learn that many fled to the colonies of America to escape religious persecution, it sometimes becomes evident (thanks to Pastor Terry), that freedom of religion only goes so far. There is a fear in this country of the religion of Islam, Islamophobia. It is a rampant fear that mostly stems from not knowing the basis of the religion, the attacks on 9/11, and the images & stereotypes of the faith of Islam.

The Council on American -Islamic Relations (CAIR) defines Islamophobia:

Islamophobia refers to unfounded fear of and hostility towards Islam. Such fear and hostility leads to discriminations against Muslims, exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political or social process, stereotyping, the presumption of guilt by association, and finally hate crimes (CAIR 2012)

After 9/11, this phobia swept the United States much like the Red Scare in the mid-20th century. Soon, the religion of Islam was questioned and criticized by those who did not understand it. As stated in the above section on the media, the images of militants and veiled women dominated the broadcasts of the Arab and Muslim world. With these images and September 11th acts as fuel, a fire of anti-Islamic sentiment spread across a misinformed country

Disparity of knowledge

In a Gallup Poll commissioned by the Executive Director of Muslim Studies, Dalia Mogaheb, citizens of the United States were asked, in 2003, what they knew about Islam. Fifty-Four percent of Americans said they knew ‘virtually nothing’ about Islam. This was to be expected, because prior to 2001, words like ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ were not everyday nomenclature. The institution polled again in 2007, same question, and this time fifty-seven percent of Americans said they knew ‘virtually nothing’ (Gallup 2009). In continuing the trend if what we don’t know can and will hurt us, it is no surprise that Islamophobia has spread throughout the country.

Inherently violent

The fliers distributed by the aforementioned student organization are prime examples of Islamophobia. The following is written on the organization’s website:

Unlike many of the religions you are familiar with, **Islam is a political and military system.** It is not just a religion.

Most American students never learn about Islam in school. [Blank Student Organization]will spend the rest of Fall 2010 raising awareness of Shariah in an attempt to spur discussion and educate people about some of the most important issues in their lifetime.

Shariah Law is incompatible with the U.S. Constitution and basic human rights. Through Dawa (stealthy jihad) and violent jihad, fundamentalists are working to reestablish the Caliphate and impose global Shariah Law. It is our goal to educate Americans about these issues so we may **protect basic human rights and empower moderate Muslims to reform violent and oppressive aspects of Islam.**²

'It is OUR goal to educate Americans' is one of my favorite lines from their mission statement on the Islam page of their website. Islamophobia, or the fear of the religion of Islam is characterized by this statement. The idea that at its core, Islam is a violent religion willing to start a global holy war in order to spread its oppressive law is one of the largest and most damaging stereotypes of the religion. The goal of this group was to educate the campus of this religion. Instead of passing out fliers with the five pillars of Islam, or explaining basic (and factual) beliefs, the members of this organization created fliers by Googling, "Quotes in the Qur'an that justify Jihad and violence". I know this because I just performed the search myself. In the search bar I typed: 'quotes from the Qur'an about jihad' and the second link on the page was to a website called the 'Prophet of Doom'. The mission of the website, in the author's own words:

"I wrote *Prophet of Doom - Islam's Terrorist Dogma in Muhammad's Own Words* to save you from Islam. If that isn't of interest to you, goodbye. *Prophet of Doom* is the best documented and most comprehensive presentation of the Islamic scriptures ever written. We have done for you what Muslims are afraid to do. We've taken the five earliest and most universally acclaimed Islamic sources (the Qur'an, Ishaq's Sira or Biography of Muhammad, Tabari's Ta'rikh or History of Islam's Formation, and Bukhari's and Muslim's Topical Hadith Collections) and have put them all together in chronological order, setting them in the context of Muhammad's life. In so doing, Muhammad's motives become immediately transparent and his religion is quickly exposed as a complete fraud. This isn't our opinion or our interpretation, it's what the Islamic scriptures actually reveal."³

This website has an entire spreadsheet (see Figure 4) devoted to quotes from the *Qur'an*, taken out of context, to show that Islam is a religion that condones violence and the killing of the infidels.

Muhammad's Own Words

Prophet of Doom was written to expose what Islam's founder had to say about himself, his ambition, religion, and god. Before you use or criticize these quotes, please [read this overview](#) from the author. For those who are serious about the study of Islam, be sure to read the source material appendix, entitled [Islam's Dark Past](#).

Fighting	
<i>Qur'an:9:88</i>	"The Messenger and those who believe with him, strive hard and fight with their wealth and lives in Allah's Cause."
<i>Qur'an:9:5</i>	"Fight and kill the disbelievers wherever you find them, take them captive, harass them, lie in wait and ambush them using every stratagem of war."
<i>Qur'an:9:112</i>	"The Believers fight in Allah's Cause, they slay and are slain, kill and are killed."
<i>Qur'an:9:29</i>	"Fight those who do not believe until they all surrender, paying the protective tax in submission."
<i>Ishaq:325</i>	"Muslims, fight in Allah's Cause. Stand firm and you will prosper. Help the Prophet, obey him, give him your allegiance, and your religion will be victorious."
<i>Qur'an:8:39</i>	"Fight them until all opposition ends and all submit to Allah."
<i>Qur'an:8:39</i>	"So fight them until there is no more Fitnah (disbelief [non-Muslims]) and all submit to the religion of Allah alone (in the whole world)."
<i>Ishaq:324</i>	"He said, 'Fight them so that there is no more rebellion, and religion, all of it, is for Allah only. Allah must have no rivals.'"
<i>Qur'an:9:14</i>	"Fight them and Allah will punish them by your hands, lay them low, and cover them with shame. He will help you over them."
<i>Ishaq:300</i>	"I am fighting in Allah's service. This is piety and a good deed. In Allah's war I do not fear as others should. For this fighting is righteous, true, and good."
<i>Ishaq:587</i>	"Our onslaught will not be a weak faltering affair. We shall fight as long as we live. We will fight until you turn to Islam, humbly seeking refuge. We will fight not caring whom we meet. We will fight whether we destroy ancient holdings or newly gotten gains. We have mutilated every opponent. We have driven them violently before us at the command of Allah and Islam. We will fight until our religion is established. And we will plunder them, for they must suffer disgrace."
<i>Qur'an:8:65</i>	"O Prophet, urge the faithful to fight. If there are twenty among you with determination they will vanquish two hundred; if there are a hundred then they will slaughter a thousand unbelievers, for the infidels are a people devoid of understanding."

Figure 4, Muhammad's Own Words. (Courtesy of www.prophetofdoom.net)

Those, like the [prophetofdoom.net](http://www.prophetofdoom.net) and the student organization on my campus, who analyze the *Qur'an* and Islam to be of violent tendencies, back up these claims with

quotes such as these from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. Any quote taken out of context from any holy book can be used to fuel any claim one wants to make about that religion. The Bible, can also be used in such a way. Take for instance, this passage from Jeremiah:

"Go up, my warriors, against the land of Merathaim and against the people of Pekod. Yes, march against Babylon, the land of rebels, a land that I will judge! Pursue, kill, and completely destroy them, as I have commanded you," says the LORD. "Let the battle cry be heard in the land, a shout of great destruction". (Jeremiah 50:21-22 NLT)

Or this one:

"Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." (I Timothy 2:11-14).

I will not go into as many quotes as the Prophet of Doom commentator did with the *Qur'an*, but the point of this exercise is that one can make any assumptions about a religion via a holy book if a quote is 'cherry picked' from the book. *Qur'anic* scholars should be the ones, not non-Muslim Americans, dissecting and interpreting the *Qur'an*:

For there to be any semblance of an intelligent and scholarly analysis of verses of the *Qur'an*, a full understanding of the Arabic language along with understanding of the context of the verses in question is an essential prerequisite. In fact, this must be the scholarly approach to the exegesis of any book of scripture, including the Hebrew and Christian Bibles (Hassabella 2002).

After 9/11, when Osama bin Laden released those tapes claiming he had acted in the name of Allah, many Americans dove into the *Qur'an* to see what the holy book said of violence. Without knowing the fundamental aspects of any religion, it is easy to make broad claims upon discovery of a quote that justifies what you were looking for. It is

easy to pass out fliers containing obscure and questionable quotes, and far easier to believe what is on that paper without any prior knowledge.

Monolithically monochromatic

Another daunting stereotype that contributes to the fear of Islam is the idea that all Muslims are the same. The idea that 1.4 billion people share the same thoughts and ideas on everything is preposterous but this is the claim that many make of the religion of Islam. Bernard Lewis, famed Princeton historian and Middle East ‘consultant’ has urged the United States government to deal toughly with Muslims and Arabs and wants the United States to “project its power over them” (AbuKhalil 2002, 18). Furthermore, Lewis asserts in his book *Islam and the West* that “all Muslims have similar characteristics and modes of behavior, and their nasty deeds can all be explained by reference to the Qur’an and classical books,” (2002, 19). There is the idea that the Muslim World is a monolithic, one cultured, one view society. Works such as Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* further support the idea of one ‘Islamic Civilization’. In his article he asserts that the next ‘clash’ or conflict will arise between the monolithic Islamic Civilization and the Western Civilization (Terry 2010 148-159). Edward Said was quick to express his concerns of Huntington’s idea:

My concern, is that the mere use of the label ‘Islam’, either to explain or indiscriminately condemn ‘Islam’ actually ends up becoming a form of attack. ‘Islam’ defines a relatively small proportion of what actually takes place in the Islamic world, which numbers a billion people, and includes dozens of countries, societies, traditions, languages and, of course, an infinite number of different experiences. It is simply false to try to trace all this back to something called ‘Islam’, no matter how vociferously polemical Orientalists insisted that Islam regulates Islamic societies from

top to bottom, that dar al Islam is a single, coherent entity, that church and state are really one in Islam, and so forth.(Said 2001)

To place Muslims under one cohesive umbrella is like saying all Christians, in every part of the world believe the same thing, practice the same thing, act the same way, etc.

While the core believes of the religion remain the same world-wide, religious practices, interpretations, culture, and language are diversified throughout the 1.4 billion Muslims around the world. Muslims in Indonesia are vastly different from Muslims in Africa, Muslims in Arab countries are vastly different than Muslims in East Asian countries. To ignorantly state that all Muslims are the same contributes to Islamophobia in that it paints an image of a society that condones the actions of a few Muslims on September 11th. This stereotype makes the large Muslim community look like a threat, for if a few members of that society were seen condoning these attacks, the rest of the Muslim world was expected to erupt into applause as well.

Bad Muslims

The idea of ‘bad Muslims’ also falls under the category of the ‘monolithic Muslim society’. Rami Khouri, a Palestinian American who is the director for the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, says:

The 9/11 attacks really shocked the United States. Because the terrorists spoke in the vocabulary of faith and Islam, people looked at them as Muslim terrorists. Talked about Islamic terror. Islam. Because of the broad lack of knowledge on Islam in the United States, and the act of terror by a couple dozen guys was conflated with the whole Islamic

religion, in a way that Timothy McVeigh was not conflated with Christianity in the United States. (Gallup 2009)

Because of the actions of a few individuals who claimed to be acting in the name of God, Islam was under siege and scrutiny from the rest of the world. After 9/11, there arose a dichotomy of ‘bad’ Muslims versus ‘good’ Muslims. This dichotomy insinuated there was something innately wrong with the faith itself:

Colin Powell excoriated Muslims to free their religion from the influence of terrorists. When the secretary of state calls on Muslims to speak out against “bad Muslims,” he implies that there is a problem with the religion itself (AbuKhalil 2002, 23).

From her interview on *Inside Islam: What a Billion Muslims really think*, Mogaheb defends her faith by saying that despite the actions of terrorists claiming to be acting in the name of Islam, Muslims should not have to feel like they have to separate themselves from the terrorism carried out in the name of faith. She says that Muslims do not feel any more need to do this than:

Any white Christian might feel like they need to separate themselves from the Ku Klux Klan, who in fact is the oldest terrorist organization in the world who commits all their acts of violence and hate in the name of Christianity; to the point of even having a giant cross as one of their symbols. (Gallup 2009).

Islamophobia has been one of the largest aspects to define the post 9/11 experience of Muslims and Arabs in this country. Not only did those terrorists ‘hijack’ their religion and use it for violent and murderous purposes, but Americans who knew little about the religion played a role in ‘hijacking’ it as well. Skewing quotes, misinterpreting doctrine

and assuming that there existed one, giant and monochromatic culture were ways in which the religion of Islam was distorted after 9/11 to create a more radical, enemy: the Islamic Terrorist whom the Muslim and Arab world's supported. Americans fear a religion that many say is in direct conflict with the ideals that make up a cornerstone of this great country. When 'people of faith' who lead congregations claim that *Allah* is not the same Judeo-Christian God and Islam is a false religion, those who listen will believe that Muslim's beliefs are wrong and have hurt this nation. Misguided and misinformed are not ingredients for a tolerant society. To reiterate, we fear what we do not know, we fear what we do not understand, and we understand less when others skew facts for their own agendas.

Hate crimes

"Those who feel like they can intimidate our fellow citizens to take our their anger do not represent the best of America. They represent the worst of humankind and they should be ashamed of that kind of behavior." George W. Bush, Washington D.C, September 17th,2001

While George W. Bush called for Americans to not turn against their fellow Arab-American and Muslim-American neighbors, many were too influenced by the media and their grief to forgive so quickly. So long as images portraying Arabs and Muslims as violent, aggressive and oppressive people, the stereotype will remain.

Instead of educating themselves or listening to the statements of Muslims and Arabs condemning the violence, many Americans felt that the only way to handle their grief

was to take up arms against the ‘other’ the enemy. Not only did Americans unite in their grief, but in the idea of rallying against the enemy, Islamic terrorists. But some did not distinguish between the skewed ideology and the peaceful Arabs and Muslims living in America—they shared the same religion and ethnicity, and became targets. The War on Terror was fought on many fronts, even our own country. American vigilantes called for blood, in return for the 3,000 lost that September day.

Patriot Act

The experience of Muslims and Americans in this country after September 11th was also changed after the passing of the federal Patriot Act. This act was hastily passed through Congress in the fall of 2001 in response to the tragedies on 9/11, in order to prevent such an event from happening again. The Patriot Act is a behemoth of a document; in simplest it essentially curtails the everyday freedoms of the American public in favor of a closely watched public. Some main points of the law are:

- The establishment of the crime of domestic terrorism and making political organizations such as anti-war organizations, gay rights organizations, and privacy rights organizations vulnerable to government surveillance, wire taps and even criminal action.
- Allow the FBI to investigate you for a criminal matter even if the agency doesn't have probable cause- agency can assert the investigation is for ‘intelligence purposes’
- Increase the rights of law enforcement personnel to search your private property in secret.
- Make it easier for law enforcement personnel to force third parties to turn over your medial, mental health, financial, library and school records. Also makes it easier for law enforcement to eavesdrop on your phone conversations and spy on you via the internet.

Land of the free and home of the constantly watched and profiled. This law, once passed a month after the attacks on 9/11, allowed the government to take action against ‘persons of interest’, also known as Arabs and Muslims.

Using the powers granted to him in the USA Patriot Act, U.S Attorney General John Ashcroft rounded up approximately 1,200 Arab, South Asian and Muslim men on suspicion of possible ties to terrorism (Curtis 2009,100).

These detainments were not the average, run of the mill criminal conviction case. Those who were detained by the United States government were not allowed access to a lawyer, the names were not released of those who were detained, and these men were incarcerated without being charged of a crime; their ethnicity or religion was enough to put these men behind bars and question their loyalty to the United States of America (2009, 100).

It must be noted that none of the individuals detained during the ‘round up’ were found to be directly linked to the terrorists or their actions (Akram 2007, 184-195).

Such actions confused the American public. The president was saying not to retaliate against our Muslim or Arabic neighbors, and yet the government was doing just that with these unlawful detentions. Many Americans deduced, ‘Well if the government doesn’t trust them, I won’t either!’

An eye for an eye

I have divided the hate crime section into two: the first describes acts of aggression and violence against Muslims and Arabs, and the other is hate speech—emails, racial slurs, or comments made to Muslims and Arabs about their religion or ethnicity.

A hate crime is defined as:

A mechanism of power and oppression involving acts of violence and intimidation against already stigmatized and marginalized groups, and intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterize the given social order (Bakalian 2009, 126).

A hate crime is an act of violence or harassment because of their identity: race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. After September 11th, this was the worse form of backlash against an already marginalized group in this nation. Instead of forgiving, the grief and anger of Americans took a Hammurabi Code turn when they demanded blood for blood. The first instance of a hate crime took place in Arizona on September 15 against a Sikh man, named Balbir Singh Sodhi. Sodhi owned a gas station near Phoenix, Arizona and was gunned down by an American named Frank Roque. Sikhs are neither Muslim nor Arab (most hail from the Punjab region of South East Asia), but because the man was wearing a turban and had a beard, he 'looked' Muslim enough to be killed by an angry American. Frank Roque told the police in Mesa, Arizona, "I stand for America all the way. I am an American. Go ahead. Arrest me and let those terrorists run wild" (Curtis2009, 100). He stood for America in a wrong and ignorant way. An innocent man was murdered because he 'looked like a terrorist'.

Weeks after the attack, tensions ran high as attacks on Arabs and Muslims rose. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee reported:

Over 700 violent incidents targeting Arab Americans or those perceived to be Arab Americans, Arabs, and Muslims, including several murders. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (2002) reported 1,062 incidents of violence, threat, or harassment during the initial onslaught of the 9/11 backlash (Cainkar 2009, 192).

Lousie Cainkar says in her book *Homeland Insecurity* that it is known for sure that the backlash against Muslims and Arabs was not over by the time her book went to press in 2008 (2009, 192).

Surveys are another way to gauge the backlash against Muslims and Arabs after 9/11. A Pew Research Center poll conducted in 2007, asked a sample of 1,050 Muslim Americans to report the experiences as Muslims in America:

26 percent has been treated or viewed with suspicion, 15 percent had been called offensive names, 9 percent had been singled out by police, and 4 percent had been physically attacked or threatened in the previous year. Those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine years reported slightly more incidents. While 32 percent of the entire sample had encountered at least one of the four types of intolerance (Bakalian 2009, 133).

An FBI report also concluded that there was an influx anti-Muslim and anti-Arab hate crimes after 9/11, the statistics increased from 28 incidents in 2000 to 481 in 2001 (Abdelkarim 2007, 196-205).

These statistics have shown that after 9/11, there was an immediate backlash in the form of hate crimes against the Muslim and Arab communities in this country. Many were afraid and hurt after that Tuesday and resorted to violence against the group that had 'caused it'. Despite the Muslim and Arab attempts to prevent such a backlash by issuing fatwas, statements and displays of support for the United States, many Americans took it to be their responsibility to punish the 'terrorists' and did not differentiate between peaceful American citizens and Osama bin Laden. Every Muslim or Arab man was a threat, and every veiled woman was a symbol of the oppressive nature of the religion the terrorists were acting in the 'name of'. The following is a list of violent hate crimes instigated against American citizens of Arab descent or those who practiced Islam.

- In Los Angeles, on September 20, 2001, a 48-year-old father of three and a Christian was murdered at the store he owned.
- September 21, 2001, a man from Middlebury, Ohio drove his car into the entrance of a Mosque, going 80 miles per hour
- September 21, 2001, in Huntington, New York, an inebriated driver attempted to run over a Pakistani lady in a parking lot, then chased her into a store, threatening to kill her for 'destroying his country.'
- September 24, 2001, in Ardsely New York, an Arab American who owned a deli was asked by a customer if he was Arab. When the owner responded honestly, the customer cursed and yelled at him. Then sprayed the deli owner with pepper spray when the owner tried to escort the irate customer from the store.
- September 25, 2001, six bullets fired through windows of Dallas area mosque overnight.
- Boston University 2001, a student was stabbed in the back and arms after leaving an off campus fundraiser for victims of the World Trade Center attacks
- September 19, 2001, A man from San Francisco, of Indian descent was severely beaten up and his girlfriend was stabbed by a gang of young

(All above from Haddad 2002)

- In Berkeley, California in September 2004, eight female Muslim students at the University of California were accosted by three white males who sprayed water on them, pelted them with water bottles, screamed derogatory statements, and mocked the traditional hijabs worn by some Muslim women. One woman was called an "East Oakland nigger." Two of the Muslim women reported that while this was the first time they have been physically confronted in Berkeley, verbal racial taunts are frequent.
- In January 2009, Memphis store clerk Mohammed Al Hadi was murdered by an unknown assailant who calmly took aim and then fired, as if "he has some vendetta." On the same day, at another grocery store nearby, another clerk of Middle Eastern descent was also murdered.
- In October 2008, Gagandeep Singh, a 10 year-old Sikh boy, was assaulted while walking home from school in Wayne, New Jersey by an unknown assailant who threw him to the ground and then cut his hair. To Sikhs, the cutting of hair is a particularly hateful crime, as they consider their hair a gift from God. "He came out of nowhere," Singh said. "He just came up behind me, threw me on the floor, held me with his feet and cut my hair with the knife or scissor. Then I jumped a few fences and ran away because I was so scared." Singh wonders of his assailant, "Why did you cut my hair? What do you want from Punjabis?" (Civil Rights 2012)

These examples are a brief list of instances where Muslims, Arabs and those who 'look like terrorists' were victims of violent hate crimes. Unfortunately, the above list is a short ticker of the crimes committed against those whose only crime was being of the same ethnicity or religion as those who hijacked the planes on September 11th. While the number of these attacks dropped in 2007, the number of hate crimes against Muslims and Arabs greatly increased after the events on 9/11.

Sadly, the most recent hate crime happened in late March 2012. A young Iraqi woman, Shaima Alawadi, was found severely beaten her California home, she died a few days after the attack from her brutal injuries. This mother of five had reportedly received a note reading “Go back to your own country. You’re a terrorist” a month prior to the attack. In a picture that has been circling the internet, Alawadi’s smiling face hides behind sunglasses and a perfectly applied hijab. This innocent woman was victim to a murder that many are claiming to be religiously and racially motivated. While the investigation is still underway and such motives remain to be proven, this young mother’s ethnicity as Arab and her identity as a Muslim may have made her a target for such brutal acts of violence (Associated Press).

Go home

Another instance of a hate crime presents itself through emails, comments and racial slurs. The phrase, ‘sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me’ is an outdated nursery rhyme when it comes to the threatening and hate driven emails some Americans sent to Muslims and Arabs after 9/11. American vigilantes who were not radical enough to commit acts of violence lashed out at many with their tongues.

A friend who grew up in a small town in east Texas sent me a list of racial terms he knew regarding Muslims and Arabs (warning to the reader; these are racially charged terms and some are *very* offensive):

- Ay-Rab
- Johnny Ay-Rab

- Towel head
- Rag head
- Haji
- Camel jockey
- Camel fucker
- Sand nigger
- Abba Dabba
- 7-11
- Ahmed
- Abdul
- Ahab
- Batman: for women wearing the black abayas
- Cairo coon
- Cave nigger
- Derka and or derka derka

While I did not want to know this, he said there were far more than that; those were just the ones he could recall hearing people use in conversation. Racial slurs are ways to insult someone of a different race or ethnicity. It dehumanizes the race and the person being harassed. The one that I personally find most offensive (among many) is Hajji. The *hajj* is the most important trip of a Muslim's life. It is the final pillar of Islam that asks the worshipper to travel to the city where it all began, the city where the prophet Mohammad had first heard the word of God, where the ancient house of Abraham acts as a symbol of the great ancestors of the monotheistic religions, and yet so many throw the slur 'Hajji' at those who look Arab or Muslim. It undermines the importance of that pilgrimage, and uses a Muslim's faith against him in a derogatory fashion.

Another instance of words being used against Arabs and Muslims were the slew of emails they received following the attacks, some examples follow (warning: explicit language is used here as well):

- Baby killers, spineless worms, dirt of the mother's womb
- Godfuckingdamnyou
- I now enjoy watching Arabs and Muslims die
- You should start acting like Americans and not terrorists
- Get out of our country...you ignorant pieces of crap!
- I will enjoy watching your countries and people burn
- I hope Bush kicks you bastards out of my fucking country (Haddad 2002)
- Jim, you towel head. Death to every Arab. We'll slit your throat and kill your children (Zogby 2010, 15).
- We should wipe this scum off the face of the earth! I personally don't care about their babies, mothers, brothers dogs, cats, or whatever. They should all die horrible and torturous death and then writhe in the pits of hell for all eternity.
- UNITED STATES OFFICIALS NEED TO DEPORT EVERY ARAB BACK TO THEIR DIRTY SANDY ASS COUNTRIES SO THEY CAN BURN WITH THE REST OF THEIR PEOPLE. DIE RAG HEADS! (Maiwandi 2002, 111-112).

These are again, a sample from the sources I collected that discuss emails sent to Arabs and Muslims in the days that followed September 11th. These emails demonstrate the idea that all Muslims and Arabs were responsible for the attack and other Americans were going to make sure those 'rag heads' got it through their head that the greatest country in the world does not take attacks lightly. Arabs and Muslims who were proud Americans received these emails in the wake of the tragedies and were forced to not only grieve for their attacked country, but also worry of their own fates. Such acts as the

violent hate crimes and these instances of hate speech are just the cusp of what Muslims and Arabs have experienced in this country after 9/11.

If you're not with us, you're against us

To quote George W. Bush's statement to a Joint Session of Congress and the American people on September 20, 2001, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists". With that rhetoric, it appeared almost impossible to outwardly disapprove of war against terrorism. If you were against military intervention, you were seen as on the side of the terrorists, and many Americans took that phrase to heart as they continued their vigilante tactics in the post 9/11 society. The aforementioned hate crimes and speech can also be viewed in the lens of this rhetoric, for, as discussed before, Muslims and Arabs are considered to still be immigrants because they do not fit the mold of being easily assimilated, and their religion prevents them from being wholly American thanks to Islamophobia; thus, they could not possibly be on the side of freedom, they must be on the side of the terrorists. More hate crimes, more slurs, more hate and hate and hate.

There is one group of Americans that lost the most on that fateful day, their loved ones. Three thousand people lost their lives that day, and thousands more lost friends, family members, sisters, mothers, wives, husbands, brothers. These families should have been among the front lines when Bush called for infinite justice! Except that there were some dissenters.

Families of those who had lost someone that day decided to not demand justice for their deceased love ones in the form of a violent war. Peaceful Tomorrows is a union of 9/11 families who decided, instead of turning their grief into fear or hatred, turned their grief into an action of peace. Jim Potori worked on the 95th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center and was working in the skyscraper when the tower was struck. He never saw his younger brother, David Potori again. David Potori lost a mentor, a brother and a friend, and consciously made the decision that nothing, not revenge or violence could bring back his brother. Instead, he and other families formed an alliance that would become Peaceful Tomorrows. Potori and other families contributed to a novel that documented the experiences of these families on September 11th and the days, months and years that followed. The mission statement on their website reads:

Peaceful Tomorrows is an organization founded by family members of those killed on September 11th who have united to turn our grief into action for peace. By developing and advocating nonviolent options and actions in the pursuit of justice, we hope to break the cycles of violence engendered by war and terrorism. Acknowledging our common experience with all people affected by violence throughout the world, we work to create a safer and more peaceful world for everyone.

While the rest of America seemed to focus on ‘getting even’, those who had paid the ultimate toll in the events on September 11, 2001, were asking for a different path for their nation. “Not in my son/daughter/Father/brother/sister/etc name” will this war be waged they begged.

Those of us who lost family members that morning found ourselves in particularly painful positions. Our losses were not simple murders, but international incidents, symbols and public events. Billions of people experienced the exact moment of our loved ones’ deaths. And whether we liked it or not, their deaths would become public property. They would be

invoked on any number of occasion, for any number of purposes, by people we didn't know, and in many cases didn't agree with or care for (Potori 2003, 7).

These families have attended anti-war protests and have travelled to Afghanistan on good will missions in the years that followed 2001. On these trips, they have dialogued with Afghanis and have even helped with schools, orphanages, and hospitals. Their grief, their murdered loved ones were better remembered, to them, not through the frame of the War on Terror, but through healing cultural barriers in peaceful, humanitarian ways. Unfortunately, their status of 9/11 families did not make them immune to the rhetoric, 'with us or with the terrorists'. Many Americans found Peaceful Tomorrow's anti-war protests and trips to Afghanistan frightening and wrong. Some emails that the group received after such events resemble the same language used in emails sent to Arabs and Muslims:

- Congratulations on being the Jane Fondas for the Millenium and I mean it in the worst possible connotation. Your position is deplorable and your actions are disgusting. You have no education regarding war and the need for defending our country. I am so glad that President Bush would not meet with you; you don't deserve the honor
- I think it's sad you lost your family in the WTC but your liberal, victim position in life is so tired I can't begin to write about how pathetic you look to those of us who live healthy, functional lives. You should have your citizenship revoked and be jetted out of this country.
- Refusing to fight and utterly capitulating to an enemy isn't compassionate, it's cowardly. And condemning the poeple [sic] who protect you to stick up for people who want you dead is just plain stupid. Until you people come to your senses, I can only pray that you're in the path of the next bomb.

The families who lost a loved one to terrorist attacks were attacked themselves for condemning the bombing of Afghanistan and rallying for peaceful ways to rectify the

injustices of 9/11. Their loved ones death did exactly what they feared it would, incite revenge and the loss of more innocent lives. Those who emailed such hateful words to these families as the aforementioned emails showcase were in support of a war brought on by the death of that family member's loved one-and yet...that was the email that was sent to them? Not one of condolence, of more hate? The paradox is excruciatingly painful to analyze. "With us or against us" does not leave much room for dissent in a nation that exonerates its 'freedom of speech'.

Education

Stereotypes, misconceptions, and overall ignorance can be rectified by an education and knowledge of such stigmatized groups as Muslims & Arabs. Elementary, Middle School, High School and Higher Education can provide factual information; instead of the sensational on such topics as Islam, history of the Middle East or Middle Eastern/Muslim culture. Classrooms can break free of the grip society clasps on young minds bound by stereotypes and misunderstandings. Unfortunately, that is an utopian view of the education system.

I could not conclude this paper without including aspects of my other research project on the education system in the state of Texas. Texas is a large state with a long history of strong Texas pride. I am proud to call Texas my home; I look forward to the bluebonnets peppering the highways in late spring, the Tex-Mex, the rodeos, and livestock peering at cars from behind barbed wire on back farm roads. However, there are aspects of this

state that I have grown to resent. One of them is the education system, especially the Texas Board of Education.

As I explained in my narrative, I noticed an imbalance in curriculum within my social studies classroom, and further noted the disparity throughout my college career after taking Middle Eastern-focused classes. There were eras of history described in my college classes that were not once mentioned in my World History class in high school. In my Geography of the Middle East class, my professor told us of the Golden Age of Islam (750 C.E-1258 C.E), with its scientists, innovators, mathematicians, doctors, philosophers and scholars. The discoveries these pioneering Arabs and Muslims made during this era were contributing factors to the success of the European Renaissance. It was a time where Muslims, Christians and Jews coexisted happily in the various empires, and the Islamic World was appreciated as progressive and enlightened.

Before I admitted failure on my other project, I had managed to contact one World History teacher at a public high school in Texas. She told me that Middle Eastern history composed only ten percent of the entire curriculum of World History. She said that she only covered the Golden Age of Islam in her AP World History classroom.

Unfortunately, AP World History is an advanced placement history class that the majority of high school students will never take.

The Texas Board of Education made headlines in 2010 with a hotly contested new curriculum and textbook debate. In May of 2010, a new curriculum that was more based on the ideology of the Board than the bettering of education in Texas classrooms, passed. This new curriculum did such things as, “cut Thomas Jefferson from a list of figures whose writings inspired Revolutions in the 18th century,” in favor of more religious philosophers such as St. Thomas of Aquinas and John Calvin (McKinley 2010). Thomas Jefferson is not well liked by conservatives of the Board because of his support for the separation of church and state. Other topics nixed from the curriculum were the KKK’s actions in Texas, as well as the contributions of African Americans and Mexican Americans in history.

This was not the final debate among the Board on curriculum reform; a textbook debate also occurred in September of that year. The Board raised the question, “Are Texas youth being fed a sugar-coated version of Islam while Christianity is unfairly taken to task for its sins?” (Huus 2010).

Textbooks were now under fire and conservatives on the Board issued a warning that textbooks would not be approved for use in the State of Texas if the book was found to be teaching pro-Islam, anti-Christian doctrine. Those responsible for the new resolution feared Texas children were not being taught correctly about Islam, especially failed Texas Board of Education Candidate Randy Rives of Odessa Texas who drafted the bill.

He said, “Our documentation clearly shows that the bias is out there, and we feel it was not done by accident”.

However, a religious freedom watch dog group called the Texas Freedom Network did a point-by-point analysis (See Table 1) of the claims made by conservative Board members.

Table 1: Claims Made by Education Board (Texas Freedom Network)

Claim	Fact
<p>World History textbooks provide, in some cases, twice as much coverage for Islamic beliefs, practices and holy writings than they do for Christianity.</p>	<p>This claim is based on an incomplete review of the textbooks. In fact, the review appears to ignore whole sections of textbooks that discuss Christianity. Among the ignored topics were the church in the Byzantine Empire; monasticism and church reform in the Middle Ages; the Holy Roman Empire; canon law; religion as a unifying force in Europe; the Reformation; and Christian influences on art, architecture and culture in the Renaissance and other eras. Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDougal’s world history textbook, p. 425, in a discussion of writers during the Northern Renaissance, ‘Although some of Erasmu’s must stinging barbs were aimed at the clergy, his work is strongly Christian. Erasmus believed in a Christianity of the heart, not one of ceremonies and rules. He thought that in order to improve society, all people should study the Bible.

Table 1 Continued

<p>World History textbooks “dwell” on atrocities committed by Christian Crusaders during the Middle Ages while ignoring similar atrocities by Muslim leaders such as Tamerlane.</p>	<p>These claims are based on passages often taken out of context or ignored altogether. That the Crusaders were guilty of various atrocities against Muslims, Jews and Christians is historical fact. In addition, however, nearly all world history textbooks used in Texas classrooms also discuss conquests and atrocities committed by Muslim leaders, including those by Tamerlane. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glencoe’s textbook, p. 269, includes this passage about a Muslim attack on Delhi in India in the 14th century: “As many as 100,000 Hindu prisoners were massacred before the gates of the city. It was India’s first meeting with Timur Lenk (Tamerlane).” • McDougal’s textbook, p. 444, discusses the same massacre: “In 1398, he swept through northern India, leaving destruction and decaying corpses in his wake. He butchered the inhabitants of Delhi and made a pyramid of their skulls.” • The same McDougal textbook also describes how Timur the Lane (Tamerlane) burned Baghdad to the ground.
<p>World history textbooks “whitewash” Islamic culture by ignoring Muslim practices involving sexism, slavery and persecution outside groups.</p>	<p>Textbooks used in Texas classrooms do discuss the treatment of women and slaves in Islamic society. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glencoe, p. 205: “According to Islam, all people are equal in the eyes of Allah. . . . One group of people in the Islamic world was not considered equal. They were the slaves. As in the other civilizations we have examined sofar, slavery was widespread.”

Table 1 Continued

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glencoe, p. 206: “Islamic teachings did account for differences between men and women in the family and social order. Both had duties and responsibilities. As in most societies of the time, however, men were dominant in Muslim society. . . . After the spread of Islam, older customs eroded the rights enjoyed by early Muslim women.” • Glencoe, p. 270: “Like rulers elsewhere at this time, many Muslim rulers in India were intolerant of other faiths.” • Prentice Hall’s textbook, p. 254: “Although later Muslims overlooked Muhammad’s principle of tolerance, in general, the People of the Book [Christians and Jews] enjoyed religious freedom in early Muslim societies.” (p. 255): “Though spiritually equal, men and women had different roles and rights. For example, the amount of an inheritance given to a daughter was less than that given to a son. A woman could seek a divorce, but it was harder for her to get one than for a man.” • Textbooks also discuss how Muslims over time adopted practices of people they conquered, including a requirement that women be veiled and genders kept separated.
<p>The resolution claims that Muslim influence over world history textbooks will increase as Arabs invest in publishing companies and it notes, in particular, Arab investors in the parent company of publisher Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.</p>	<p>In the modern era’s globalized economy, foreign investment in U.S.-based publishing companies has not been unusual. For example, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt is part of Education Media and Publishing Group, which is registered in the Cayman Islands (a British territory) and run by Irish businessman Barry O’Callaghan. The British company Pearson controls numerous educational publishing units, including</p>

Table 1 Continued

	<p>prominent U.S. brands such as Prentice Hall and Scott Foresman. Neither of those companies has been accused of sneaking pro-British or pro-Irish propaganda into American textbooks. It would be just as unlikely that Arab investors want to risk their capital by trying to politicize textbooks sold in markets that would probably be hostile to pro-Muslim propaganda.</p>
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The resolution passed and the Texas Board of Education, “instructed publishers to curtail positive knowledge of Islam and include more favorable treatment of Christianity in future World History textbooks,” (Stutz 2010). The resolution added that the Board members were worried Middle Eastern investment in textbook companies would encourage more religious bias in Texas schools.

The resolution, entrenching the education system of the state of Texas with the ideology of the Board, passed 7-6. Three Democratic and three moderate Republicans voted against the resolution, two other Democratic members of the Board were absent and missed the vote.

Moderate and Democratic members of the Board were outraged.

This makes us look cuckoo. It’s crazy. We are allowing ourselves to be distracted by this narrow minded resolution, which is itself biased. We should have taken higher ground on this, said Ricky Agosto D-San Antonio (2010)

Lawrence Allen, a Democrat from Houston and the only Muslim on the Board, stated that the rhetoric and language used in the resolution was offensive and the “supporters of the resolution were making accusations about Pro-Muslim bias without any proof.”

The students of Texas can now expect a curriculum and textbook that fit the standards of ultra conservative law makers. It is unfortunate that ten years after the 9/11 attacks, these debates are occurring in the top echelons of our state government.

Academia is accused of leaning left and skewing facts of history in favor of more liberal views (Huus 2010). But it is the victors who write history and victors who are able to pass resolutions that grant them the ability to rewrite history in favor of their ideologies.

Education is one of the best opportunities to learn about the world, religions and cultures, yet the curriculums are currently at the mercy of politicians wanting to assert their opinions on the young minds in Texas schools. Without knowledge of the positive aspects of Islam (first religion to grant rights to women, its universal message, etc), the destructive Islam shown on television and media outlets has free reign to skew and make permanent stereotypes and misconceptions of the Muslim and Arab worlds. Unless the Texas School Board of Education can separate church from state in the Lone Star State, we will remain a lonely island of wrongly education students who may hold damaging misconceptions of the world beyond the borders of the United States of America.

Mansfield School District

After my trip to Saudi Arabia, a fellow traveler sent me an article with the tagline, “Oh wow, I feel bad you live in Texas!” The article addressed a school district in Texas that was getting rid of its proposed Arabic language program.

Mansfield School District is located just outside of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. This Texas school district was attempting to implement more study of the Arabic culture as well as offer a language course in middle school and high school. The districts rationale was that there a deficiency in Arabic speakers in the United States of America. Spokesperson Richie Escovedo said:

"The federal government sees Arabic, Chinese and Russian as critical," Escovedo said. "Our country has a deficit in Arabic speakers and people who understand the Arabic culture." (Rogers 2011)

The district already offering Chinese and Russian wanted to ‘round out’ it’s critical language offerings. The parents of Mansfield students did not share the same sentiments as the optimistic administration. Instead of viewing the program as an opportunity for their children to learn a language in demand or better understanding a culture that is not well known, many saw it as a threat to the well-being of the students. One concerned mother said:

“We don’t want to discriminate against the entire Middle East,” she said, “but [9/11] is hard to forget. They said they aren’t going to teach religion, but I don’t see how you can teach that culture without going into their beliefs.” (Elliott 2011).

The district cancelled the Arabic classes after two hundred angry parents showed up to a meeting discussing the new curriculum changes. Some were visibly shaken at the idea of their children learning about Islam. It is too soon to teach students that the actions of the hijackers on 9/11 did not speak for the billions of Muslims around the world who condemned such actions? While I cannot speak for these parents, there are sources that cite fear of conversion if taught about the religion of Islam or language of Arabic. In an op-ed by David Pipes, entitled “A Madrassa Grows in Brooklyn”, the Middle East Quarterly Journal editor launched into attack mode against the Khalil Gibran School in New York City. The academy was an international academy that offered an Arabic English curriculum to teach native speakers with non-native speakers. The goal was to have the students speak both Arabic and English fluently by graduation. Pipes had an issue with such a school operating in the United States. He claimed that, “the Arabic language instruction is inevitably laden with pan-Arabist and Islamist baggage” (Zogby 2010, 36). Pipes even claimed that “merely learning Arabic carries the assumption of an eventual conversion to Islam and called for the shuttering of the nation’s first Arabic dual-language school before it even opened,”(2010, 36).

I am studying the language of Arabic and have no desire to convert to the language of Islam, lest Mr. Pipes forget that there are also beautiful Bibles written in Arabic that can be read.

Islamophobia is the best term to define the actions of the parents of Mansfield and Pipes' article. As discussed earlier in this paper, the fear of the religion of Islam is plaguing our society and preventing necessary progress in the nation's school. There is a need for more Arabic and Middle Eastern scholars in this country; since 2001 this nation has been involved in military campaigns in two Middle Eastern countries, yet, as the example of Mansfield shows, when administrations recognize the need to learn Arabic or Middle Eastern culture, there is a backlash from scared Americans who claim it is 'too soon' to learn such things. To say this nation needs more experts on the region in order to properly advise in preventing future conflicts (i.e. Iran), is an understatement.

TAPPS

Islamophobia does not stop in Mansfield. Recently, another Texas education based organization was grudgingly put in the spot light after claims were made that this particular organization was Islamophobic. TAPPS, or the Texas Association of Private and Parochial Schools is under fire for denying Islamic schools in Texas acceptance into their private school organization. This organization enables private and religious schools to compete in athletic events, fine arts events and academic events to name a few.

Wanting to join on the private school playing field was a Muslim school. In 2010, the Imam Academic SW in Houston received a questionnaire that was ignorant and dripping with anti-Islamic sentiment. The following are some of the questions:

- "What is your attitude about the spread of Islam in America?"

- “It is our understanding that the Koran tells you not to mix with (and even eliminate) the infidels. Christians and Jews fall into that category. Why do you wish to join an organization whose membership is in disagreement with your religious beliefs?”
- “Historically, there is nothing in the Koran that fully embraces Christianity or Judaism in the way a Christian and/or a Jew understands his religion. Why, then, are you interested in joining an association whose basic beliefs your religion condemns?”
- “How does your school address certain Christian concepts? (i.e. celebrating Christmas)”
- “When was the Bible allegedly polluted? Does the Koran actually state that the Bible is polluted?”

In addition to answering those questions, school officials were then “grilled in person about the Qur’an and the proposed Ground Zero mosque,” (Falkenberg 2012). Cindy Steffens, an administrator with Imam Academy SW said, “We didn’t see how it [questionnaire] had anything to do with TAPPS or our kids and sports,” (Waldron 2012). The Imam Academy subjected itself to the questionnaire and the interrogation, and was still denied membership.

“Our kids are just as American as their kids,” an academy official said. “We just wanted to play ball.” (New York Times 2012).

Many schools who are members of TAPPS have spoken out against the practices of TAPPS, but they feel such a stance against the organization could have detrimental effects on their own memberships. It is the only organization that religious and private schools can compete, so leaving the organization is not an option either. But, many have been vocal in their opinions on this situation. A rabbi spoke out against this organization on his blog (see, Muslims and Jews can agree on something!);

First of all, this is sports league, not a religious debate league. It should not matter one bit what the beliefs of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are with regard to anything other than the scheduling and executing of the league schedule. The idea that the Muslim schools need to be “vetted” just so that they could play in the same league is extremely xenophobic (Fink 2012).

The leaders of TAPPS need to educate themselves properly on the religion of Islam, before asking an Islamic school to defend their faith.

Islamophobia is present in education systems within the state of Texas. The textbook debate, curriculum reform and anger over an Arabic program are prime examples of how this state is not properly handling the issue of education of Islam, Arabs, and the Middle East. Islamic schools, seeking soccer opponents, are denied acceptance into an organization because the leaders of TAPPS are afraid of the religion of Islam. It's a vicious cycle; not knowing about the religion of Islam or the Arab World scares people, leaders are afraid of the religion and culture so they prevent its teaching in schools, another generation will not learn properly about this religion & society and may come to fear it.

Conclusion

This paper is a brief introduction to the experiences of Muslims and Arabs after 9/11. Other aspects of the experience such as airport profiling, airplanes incidents, backlash after more troops were sent to Iraq, and the mosque ‘at Ground Zero’ debacle were not

discussed in this research, but are examples of other factors defining the Muslim and Arab experience after 9/11.

To properly explain and give any justice, such experiences need a novel, not a research paper as the medium. Although I now conclude this paper, the issue itself is not over. After 9/11, American Muslims and America Arabs were not only grieving for their country. After an extremist minority tainted the Arab culture and Islamic religion, many were forced to defend their religion and way of life. The experience after 9/11 was one that saw a rise in hate crimes, hate speech, threats, racism, harassment and Islamophobia. The media has played a large role in reinforcing already established stereotypes (thanks to Orientalism) and education systems, especially in Texas, do little to help refute misconceptions and stereotypes of the Muslim and Arab worlds.

It has been eleven years since the 9/11 attacks. Three thousand Americans lost their lives that day and a nation was forever changed. A small group of terrorists claiming to act in the name of God caused a demographic in America to inadvertently pay for *Al Qaeda's* sins by becoming scapegoats in American society. Timothy McVeigh's horrific bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was not answered with backlash against the white, Christian community of America. Many Americans fear what is not known, what is not understood. Islam and the Arab world fall into both of those categories.

Unless the media addresses more positive aspects happening in the Arab world (minus the violence in Syria, perhaps coverage of the Arab Spring and its images of people calling for democracy have helped this image) or education systems change curriculum and teach more about the Arab and Muslim world (without having angry parents march up to the school district to combat such changes), than problems associated with the 9/11 backlash will be slow to rectify.

Many Americans need to update their psyches; instead of ‘up in arms against the enemy’ it should be ‘up in books and knowledge about the enemy before I decide to take up arms!’. If we are going to bold on to the title, ‘the best country in the world’, as many Americans proudly believe, then we need to hold ourselves to a much higher standard of tolerance and understanding. The stereotypes and misconceptions of Islam, the Middle East and the Arab culture, should not be the predominate mentality among Americans. It is time to stop fearing those who are different, stop fearing a religion and ethnicity we do not fully understand. Education of the proper teachings of Islam and Arab culture that refute popular stereotypes and misunderstandings can improve the situation of Muslims and Arabs in America.

The ‘best country in the world’ is not the proper title for this nation if its citizens continue to harass and blindly hate a religion culture whose only crime was sharing Islam and ethnicity with extremists. American Muslims and Arab-Americans, a decade

after September 11, 2001, should not have to ask of their fellow Americans, “Why do they *still* hate us?”

NOTES

1. See William D. Griffin's *The Irish Americans*, 2001.
2. See www.aggieconservatives.org/islam for more on their Fall 2010 Anti-Islamic Campaign
3. See www.prophetofdoom.org

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APPENDIX

NARRATIVES

This section of the research is a supplementary section that details the personal experiences of Arabs, Muslims on this campus. I had planned on conducting more interviews, but due to the lack of time and scheduling conflicts, there are not as many interviews as intended. The stories recorded or received in an email contain opinions and some statements may be offensive to the reader. Due to the nature of this emotional and personal research, where participants felt free to truly share their experiences, racial slurs and phrases were often referenced. The researcher apologizes in advance if anyone is offended by the reality of this topic.

“B”

The first interview I conducted was with a dear friend whom I met within my own major. She too has travelled to the Middle East and her interview offers a middle ground between the groups I am interviewing.

The subject of racism, stereotypes and ignorance of the Middle East is not an unusual topic for she and I to discuss. Sadly, we have many conversations venting our stress and frustrations of understanding a region and a religion that many at this campus and even this country refuse to understand. One of our professors recently told us, in a class she and I share, that we know more about Islam and the Middle East than 99% percent of the population. I hope he was exaggerating because that is a gaunt and horrifying statistic.

My friend grew up in a Canyon Lake, Texas, a small town outside of the city limits of San Antonio. She grew in a bicultural home, her mother is Hispanic and her father is white or Caucasian. She identifies has been half of each ‘race’. For the purposes of this paper, she will be referred to as “B”. “B” grew up in a diverse home environment in a predominately Hispanic community. Her mother taught her to never judge another by outer appearances. Race did not determine worth in that household. “B” was never taught that those who looked different simply because of the color of their skin were vastly different than “B”. The diversity of her own identity and how she was raised has helped “B” enter a predominately white, conservative university with an open mind.

We began the interview the simple questions of where she was and what was thinking on September 11, 2001.

“I was in my 5th grade English class. I had never really ever paid attention to the news, my mom never had it on at home. It was all the same, too much violence and a bit ridiculous. Anyway, another teacher ran into the room, whispered something to my teacher and they turned on the television. I was on the other side of the room and didn’t really pay attention to the television. I was busy finishing my busy work, too concentrated on that to get up and watch a silly TV program.”

I laughed at this, knowing “B”, she probably was far too involved in her own work to worry about what was happening on something as unproductive as the television.

“I finally looked up at noticed that there really was something terrible happening. I was so confused. I didn’t understand the implications of the event that had just occurred. It did really hit home to me whenever I realized my dad had sent me a post-card from the 138th floor of the World Trade Center just a week before this event. Knowing he had been in a building that had now collapsed after a plane flew into it-well that made the whole day feel closer.”

I then asked her what she thought when it was determined that it has been Muslim extremists from Arab countries.

“I can’t really remember what I thought. It really wasn’t a big deal to me their religion or their ethnicity. I grew up in a diverse home, I was not taught to think like that. To me they were just terrorists, I didn’t have animosity to all Arabs or all Muslims. They were just terrorists, the people we were at war with. When we invaded Iraq in 2003, I looked at the country as a fragmented society. It was not the general population we were at war with, just a select few. I remember first learning about Islam in a Sociology class in high school. It never stood out to me as a religion of violence; I never felt any hate to those who practiced it. I never wanted to give into the impression that ALL of the people who practiced Islam or were Arab believed in the same principles as the terrorists who attacked us that day.”

Modern Day Rumi

While I did not get a chance to interview the author of this interview, I have known him since my sophomore year at Texas A&M. Amir Safi is of Iranian/Persian descent; his father was born in Esfahan, Iran, his mother in Tehran, Iran. Amir was ironically (so he says) born in Ames, Iowa. As far from Iran as one can get, but at least the state shared Iran's first letter.

Most Iranians are of the Shia branch of Islam, and naturally, Amir was born a Shia. He states that his favorite branch of Islam, despite not practicing it, is the Sufi order. Sufis are known as a more passionate and mystical branch of Islam. The 'hippies' of Islam, who perform dances such as 'Whirling Dervishes' were they spin and spin until they 'see the face of God'. While many orthodox Muslims scoff at Sufi practices, it is thanks to 'Wandering Dervishes', or Sufis that travelled around the world preaching about Islam, that allowed the religion to spread as far as Indonesia.

Iran has a long history of poets and poetry, not dogmatic Islamic doctrine, is the language of many Iranians. Contrary to the images shown on television of hard line Ayatollah's reigning Iran with a Green Islamic Fist, the people relish in their history of fine arts and poetry written while intoxicated on wine from the city of Shiraz.

Amir follows in the tradition of such poets as Rumi and Hafez with his own poetry. Amir and fellow poets started an organization called, Mic Check. It is a non-profit group that promotes poetry in Bryan/College Station. They host poetry slams at a local bar called Revolutions where anyone in the area can come out and listen to the written word of their friends. When I told Amir I was writing on the post 9/11 experience of Muslims and Arabs in this country, he told me he had a poem that described his own experience. It is a powerful poem that gives me goose bumps each time I read it. It speaks for many Muslims who watched Osama bin Laden say that their religion condoned his actions of violence and the killing of innocents. I now present, "Hijacked" by Amir Safi.

Hijacked

They didn't hijack the planes
 They hijacked my religion
 Changed Islam's meaning from submission
 Started taking lives
 instead of praying to be forgiven
 They tell lies to their orphans
 Tell them that their lives were ruined by the Americans
 Breeding Hate as their new Heritage
 Now, I feel helpless watching the hatred spread
 Watch on Fox News
 and SEE how the hatred spreads
 SEE how the news anchor teaspoons ignorance
 When she calls our president a pro-Abortionist.
 I don't know the man personally or what his policy is,
 But I can promise this:
 his intention has never been
 To kill infants.
 How is this relevant?
 Pro-abortionist is manipulative diction
 Mirroring the Wahabi sect of Islam,
 when they interpret Muhammad's Revelations.
 Fundamentalists aren't worried about praising all creation

They're too busy building a flock of sheep of 50 people in Gainesville, Florida and
calling it a congregation

crashing planes into buildings to send a message

Sending suicide bombers into mosques and applauding the carnage

They listen to Pat Robertson talk,

and talk,

and talk,

and talk

On a show titled for 700 perversions.

Do not be mistaken

Osama Bin Laden

and Sadaam Hussein were never friends

Iranians, Iraqis, Afghanistanians, and Pakistanians

are all Equally afraid of Terrorists

Don't for one second think that I have any less chance of dying on a hijacked plane

than you,

than you,

than you.

After nine-eleven we were rudely awaken

Our taxes, our government had once taken
and given to the Taliban

to stop the Russian spread of communism

if you don't believe me

watch Rambo III.

The seed we had planted

in hopes that it would blossom
 grew into a thorn Bush,
 So a scorned George Bush
 Declared a war on Terror.
 and labeled our actions* justice*.

But justice is JUST THIS
 Find out where Bin Laden is,
 But this time don't kill him.
 Catch him and release him
 In front of Muslim Americans.

Yes, Muslim Americans
 In front of other men with the same name Osama,
 Which means Lion-Like
 Not Like-minded terrorist
 And like- Lions
 They will tear into him.
 An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind
 Says the man with two.

Bin Laden took one of mine 10 years ago that's why my religion is now spelled SLAM.

Fundamentalists who manipulate other men
 In an attempt to play God
 Need to remember that God
 has unseated tyrants and kings
 dictatorships AND democracies
 Hitler, Stalin and Mao Z.

Need to Remember that

we have all been distilled from heavenly tears,
which I pray cleanse this world of ungodly fears

Remember that when God built this world he did it in

7 nights

6 days

With

5 pillars

4 horsemen

3 Abrahamic Religions

2 people Adam and Eve

And

With 1 love

And they want to build 1 mosque

2 blocks away

From ground zero

So they want to burn 1 Qu'ran

to redeem 2 towers

And we're falling back to zero.

Playground Racism

The next interview comes from a young man of Lebanese descent whom I met at an Arab Student Association meeting. I asked the group if their experience after 9/11, and this young man briefly quipped he had been suspended for beating a kid up when he was nine years old because the child had said something rude about Arabs. Of course I had to hear the whole story. He sent the following in an email:

The following incident took place when I was about 9 years old, 4th grade, in the weeks or couple of months after 9/11.. Pretty much my experience was with a kid at my school who was mouthing off, saying racist things about people with Middle Eastern backgrounds and he came up to me and called me terrorist. My immediate response was telling him to cut it out, and when he persisted I responded like a hot head. I hit the kid in the face and sort of tackled him to the ground and repeatedly hit him and whatnot. This was actually during a kickball game during a PE class. I get called into the principal's office and had a talk with the principal about school fights. My school really didn't take heed to the situation that 9 year old kids were actually being racist to one another. I remember the kid coming in all bruised up later in the week and that was the end of my problem with him. But my suspension didn't come till a few days later after the incident. I'm not proud of the fact I beat a kid up, because I should've been stronger than that, but what I do want to emphasize to you, is that I don't like Muslims and Americans with Arabic backgrounds being portrayed as victims. What I did at the end of the day was defend myself and who I am. Whether through a violent response to hatred or a passive response, I did act in a manner of defense. I'm also proud to say I didn't hear any shit from friends or others for a long time after that incident. Thinking back on what happened, I really focus on why this kid said that to me. I also ask where he hears talk like that. I mean really... This happened among 9 year olds-- Kids who aren't even adolescents yet. My best guess is the kids, and many others like him, heard this awful kind of talk from parents, older siblings, and bad media. Back to the point of Arab-American/Muslims being labeled victims to hate crimes... Its true in a sense, because an injustice was done unto them but I really have struggled with that label for a long time. There are many more like me, if not the majority, that respond in a manner of defense to this crap. Not necessarily with violence, like I did at the immature age of 9.. But with a manner of defending who they are. More specific to the incident, I was suspended for 3 days for fighting in school. The school gave the kid a disciplinary "warning" for bullying... I didn't understand it at that time... But BULLYING? Really? That was more than bullying. It was racist. It was prejudiced, and as I looked back on the incident as I grew up, I felt it could set a dangerous precedent if schools don't respond to this kind of thing in the right way. I don't believe a bullying warning is the right kind of response to racist remarks at middle schools and high schools. I don't want the kid to be severely punished... I want the issue to be addressed. That this bullshit is wrong, it's unfounded, and it's a collective attack on a group of people. I believe this isn't an issue that is so hard to address. The scary thing is that there is a grossly negligent inactive part of the schools to do anything. All they have to tell kids nowadays is "why would you let a few bad apples spoil the whole barrel?" The KKK hung blacks from burning crosses and called it Christianity. Timothy McVeigh bombed a building, killing scores of innocents

and he called it God's Will. You see where I'm going. It's the initial response from people that's dangerous when it involves someone with a different world background- that's the problem.

Received on April 3, 2012.

I Don't Like Urban Cowboys

Another young woman of Lebanese descent told me some stories that 'drove her crazy':

I wouldn't say that I have received a lot of discrimination but I have noticed some strange things. First, there is the incredible ignorance. Once I was at the high school subbing and I was studying for Arabic. I had flashcards out on the teacher's desk when a student asked me "What miss you speakin' muslim?". Often times the high school students were unaware what the Middle East was, where it was, or what language people from the Middle East would speak. They did however know that there was a group of mysterious people who wore head coverings that were Muslim, and that they should be suspicious of those people. Then I've had people ask me "Oh, you are Arab? Why don't you cover yourself then?" or "so you are muslim?" and "are you aloud to drive", "did you have an arranged marriage?"

My husband is dark skinned, "Oh your dad wanted you to marry a Lebanese?'. But that is just people being dumb, he's not even Arab. I've also been stared at on multiple family occasions. When I am not with my family, I could pass as white, but when we are together in a group, I can tell it makes people uncomfortable. Once I was at Starbucks with my aunt and a cousin and this older white couple watched us from a close by table. If we are out at a restaurant or in front of a teller and speaking Arabic you can almost see the fear seeping into them! I think the worst thing that happened in public was when family was out at a restaurant and my dad was on the phone with his then boss who is also Arab. They were speaking in Arabic for about 15 or 20 minutes. My sister and I started to notice that everyone around us, including the waiter, were staring at us. To the point that my sister and I got very uncomfortable and tried to cue my dad to top talking. I then got up to go get a drink and this older man with a cowboy hat came up to me and said "Your dad's been on the phone a long time." and I just said "yep" to which he said, "What's he been talkin' bout" I just told him it was non-of his business.

Received on April 3,2012

Hookah Smoking on North Gate

This email was sent from an Egyptian student.

I moved to Texas from Egypt when I was 12 right before 6th grade. Generally speaking, I have encountered little racism since I have been here except for a few occasions. There are, however, a lot of ignorant people here to be honest. When I moved to Texas in 6th grade, my teacher asked me if I rode a camel to school and if I lived in pyramids. I swear to you she was being completely serious so I played along and told her I did and that I lived in one of the great pyramids. She believed me and so did my classmates but I quickly told them I was joking and that I actually lived in an apartment.

A few people here and there commented rudely on the fact that I was Arabic and Muslim but honestly, I expect it. There was an incident two weeks ago where a guy saw me and a few other Egyptians speaking Arabic and smoking hookah near Northgate and he yelled "sand niggers" at us from his window and tried to instigate a fight.

All in all, people here are pretty respectful but a vast majority of people are ignorant. I met a guy who had never heard of Egypt before in his life and frequently people just make misconceptions about us being nomads that live in the desert and what not.

I am sorry this message is a bit long but I thought I would help you since you are helping us. If you need any more information, just message me!

Received February 2012.

Aggies for Palestine

This interview is from a young woman from Palestine. I noticed her once walking out of a building on campus on Halloween a couple of years ago. She was wearing a red shirt with a sign that said, "I'm Palestinian and Muslim! You scared?" with the black and white checkered Palestinian scarf around her neck. It was a costume in response to the fliers I mentioned earlier. I finally had the privilege of meeting her at World Fest this year, and knew I had to interview her for my project. Since she has since graduated, she sent me her story. This is her experience living as a Palestinian (not exactly America's favorite type of Arab) in America. Her story is particularly interesting because she divulged her experiences at the Israeli border. The following is the long email she sent me about her experience.

I'm a Palestinian-Muslim. I was born and raised in Texas. Lived here all my life. My parents immigrated to the U.S. about 26 years ago.

Before 9/11, when I would tell people that I was a Muslim or that I was a Palestinian, they never understood what it was. I always got the "Ohhhh what is that?!" response.

When 9/11 happened, I was in 7th grade. And it seemed to me then and still now, that the U.S. portrays that Islam and Arabs were created AFTER 9/11. I remember being in my 7th grade history class, and one of the students asked me what my ethnicity was. I said I was Arabic. And he said, "Ohhhh, so that means you're carrying a bomb on you then!"

I grew up trying to fit into a society that hates Arabs and hates Islam. I didn't grow up very religious or very cultural. In fact, I would say that my family is one of the small handful of Arabs in my hometown.

Basically, I grew up made to believe that Muslims and Arabs were bad people. Why would I believe that? Because that is what society conditioned me into believing.

I grew up watching so much news. And everything I watched on the news always seemed to be about Islam or Palestinians. So it brainwashed me into believing the biased views portrayed in the news. I used to say that it was MY OWN PEOPLE'S (Palestinians fault) for everything that was going on. But in reality, when I was younger, I had NO CLUE what was really going on.

I've traveled to Palestine about 6 times in my lifetime. Nearly all of my family lives there. I remember going when I was 11 years old. We traveled through the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. I didn't understand at the time what was going on, but now that I look back on it I realize how discriminatory that experience really was. We spent at least 3 hours going through security, while non-Arab families went by quickly. And then, when we were finally done with that, a security official followed us all throughout the airport waiting for us to board our plane. I asked my mom to take me to the restroom, and the Israeli security refused to let us go to the restrooms at the same time. She sent a police officer to follow me into the restroom and wait until I left.

I traveled again to Palestine when I was 16 years old. This was in 2005. This was when Israel was beginning to build the separation wall. This was also the year that I was issued my green Palestinian Authority I.D. Because both my parents are both Palestinian citizens, I instantly became a Palestinian citizen as well. Usually people would be proud to become a citizen of their country, but it was forced upon me against my will and is basically what I call "the card of Satan" because of the restrictions it places on me.

There are 2 I.D.'s in Palestine: the blue and the green. The green is for West Bank citizens. The blue is for Jerusalem residents. Green I.D. restricts travel and is subject to several other restrictions. The Blue I.D. has easier travel. People with the green I.D. (such as myself) are not allowed past the wall and aren't allowed to enter the city of Jerusalem or anything on the Israeli side.

Oh, let me also add, that I am not allowed to fly into the airport of Tel Aviv anymore because I am a citizen of the West Bank. So in order to travel to my own country, I have to fly into Jordan first and cross the borders.

I went to Palestine this past summer and I spent 8 hours simply trying to cross the borders and get past Israeli security.

I would say that it wasn't until after that trip when I was 16 and experienced the discrimination first hand and into my late teen years, that something finally clicked in my mind.

In 2008, Texas A&M brought Alison Weir from "If Americans Knew" to do a presentation. I would say that she was basically my catalyst to dig deeper and learn more about Palestine. She opened my eyes up to a lot of what was going on and I became more passionate and determined to learn about Palestine.

What made me even more interested, was Operation Cast Lead massacre in December 2008 - January 2009 and the Gaza Flotilla massacre in 2010. Seeing how ridiculously biased the media was in reporting the news absolutely infuriated me. So I would spend (actually still do!) all day everyday researching the news from various different sources and trying to get a complete view what was going on. A view that is next to impossible to find in the corporately-controlled mainstream media.

As I was educating myself and researching, I also tried to open up the eyes of others as well. Obviously, it was met with anger from others. I've lost count of how many people, on Facebook especially, have either blocked or deleted me because of my views. Or not even because of my views, but because of who I am as a Palestinian and as a Muslim. People have told me repeatedly to "go back to your country!"... Which astounds me, because I'm not quite sure what that means. I'm a dual Palestinian-American citizen born in the U.S. Even my former teacher from high school blocked me recently. He said that I should just go back to my country. He kept referring to Palestinians as "terrorists."

That's why I co-founded Aggies for Palestine. Too many people have no idea about what is really going on in Palestine and yet their tax dollars are going to support injustices.

Let me share with you a conversation I had with a lady just this past week.

She was nice, but she was a little 'shocked' after talking to me..

Lady: Where are u from?

Me: Beaumont, Texas.

Lady: No I mean what are you?

Me: I'm Arabic.

Lady: (Laughs for a couple of minutes), she put on her glasses to take a closer look at me. Oh, my God...I thought you was Hispanic!

Lady: You not "Muzlim" too are you? (she said it in a very sarcastic tone)

Me: Yes, I am Muslim...

Lady: *starts laughing again for a few minutes* Oh Lord...why?!

Me: Why? I was raised Muslim and it's what I believe.

Lady: *starts laughing again* Wow I still can't believe this whole time I was talking to you thinking you were a Catholic Hispanic girl.

Me: It's a diverse world. """"

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Learning the Art of Passing

This young man that was interviewed is of Palestinian descent. Both of his parents immigrated to the United States and Canada after the 1967 War. A large part of his family still resides in their home city of Nazareth, Israel (Palestine).

‘Khouri’ as he will be referred to as, was born in Dallas and grew up in Coppell, Texas, a suburb in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. He grew up speaking Arabic, as that was the language of his household. He never thought it was weird to speak one language at home and another at school—it was just the way it was.

“Growing up my mother used to tell me what I should say when people asked me about my heritage. ‘It is important to say that you’re Christian Palestinian, ‘Khouri’, not because there’s anything wrong with being Muslim, but you want people to know what religion you are.’ Throughout the year following 9/11 is when I understood why she should say that to me. As the news began surfacing that Osama bin Laden, an Arab, was behind the attacks, I didn’t initially make the link between him as an Arab and me as an Arab. I had always been funny and friendly ‘Khouri’, that’s all I was to my friends and family. But as the news reported more about Arabs and Muslims, things began to change for me. The first instance of racism I remember experiencing was when a childhood friend of mine, of many years began, jokingly in his eyes) referring to me as ‘the terrorist’ and asking me things like ‘are you going to go pray to Allah’. At first I didn’t let it bother me, because I didn’t know any better. I figured friends just gave each other a hard time. But then it began influencing other aspects of my life. I began noticing a rift between ‘American’ students and myself; I knew that they thought I was different because I was darker skinned. I grew insecure when meeting new students at school because I felt like I was judged for my appearance than who I really was.”

“I was growing up in Coppell, a 95% Caucasian area, therefore, my group of friends was entirely white. One day, a group of about five of us had ridden our bikes to the local Subway and were eating inside when two Indian high school students walked by the front of the store. Upon seeing them pass through the window, another close friend of mine (grandson of two veterans and who is now currently contracted with the U.S Army) stood up, leaned out the door and yelled after them, ‘Go home!’ while my other friends laughed my mind began racing. I thought, ‘those kids are Indian, not Arab like my friend is thinking, does he know the difference? Should say something?’ He came back and sat down. Then, the Indians came into the Subway and walked straight toward our table. ‘Which one of you guys said that?’ they asked. My friend very proudly identified himself and the student asked him ‘why would you say that? I’ve lived in this country longer than you have because I am older than you and I was born here! You’re lucky we’re nice, because what you just did is very offensive and somebody not so nice would have definitely made you pay for what you said. Be more careful next time’ and they left. I sat silently as my friends bad mouthed the two teens for the rest of our lunch. That will always be a big regret of mine from my childhood. “

“I began studying at university in Fall 2008. I was the only one of my group of friends that came to A&M, I was lacking in the social area. This led me to join a fraternity. I would eventually regret this decision, upon realizing that students from places like Coppell join fraternities and I was surrounding myself with the same kind of intolerance my friend displayed at Subway. Each pledge or new member was given a demeaning nick name and my future ‘brothers’ unanimously decided, while drinking and laughing hysterically that I would be called the ‘Taliban Pledge’. I laughed along with them throughout my time in the fraternity, even embracing the name at times, not wanting to voice my offense, being that these were my only friends in college. After all, they were just joking, right?”

“I declared a minor in Arabic to accompany my degree. I wanted to learn the language of my family and also learn about the religion of most Arabic speakers. I spent a summer in Jordan, immersed in the culture and language of my heritage. Upon returning, I quit the fraternity. There is an annual event called World Fest, where cultural groups in the Bryan/ College Station area display booths depicting countries, cultures, religions, you name it. It’s a fun day with beautiful displays and good food. During my senior year, my third time at this event, I was the leader of the Palestine/Levant group. I wore a traditional white robe called a ‘thobe’ and black and white checkered keffiyeh (scarf). Things were going great, but half-way through the event, a college aged guy approached me and handed me a Bible translated into Arabic. I told him, thank you, but you should know that everybody at this booth is Christian. And he said, ‘that’s fine, you can leave this at your booth if you’d like.’ Not finding it appropriate for anyone to proselytize any religion at an event of this nature, I answered, ‘no thank you.’ A couple hours later, a nice Lebanese woman in her 40s approached our booth, I spoke to her at length in Arabic, enjoying the conversation. Suddenly, from her purse, she pulled out the same Arabic translated Bible. I kept my smile, and told her in Arabic ‘Thank you, your friend already brought me one and I told him that all members of this booth are Christian. We do not need proselytization,’ and she insisted, being from a Baptist church, that we should keep the Bible anyway and think about attending their church. Eventually she left.” I found it saddening, that after connecting on such a level with this woman, that is was all for the purpose of her handing me a holy book I have read. She thought our whole booth was Muslim and her church had instructed her to pass out those translated Bibles to ALL the Arabic booths at the event. There were at least 10 Middle Eastern booths at World Fest, all of them receiving the same Bible.”

“I regret the times in my childhood when I allowed for what I thought were jokes, to be made, at the cost of my heritage and culture. What I have learned now is to always speak up when such incidents arise. I make it known that I am Christian, but I do not do it in a manner that puts down the faith of Islam. I am not looking to protect myself from the prejudices that unfortunately come at the mention of Islam, but rather assert that not all Arabs are Muslim. Arabs are not all the same, most are very amazing and great people.”

Humanizing the Enemy

This interview came from a young woman born in America, of Egyptian parents. She grew up in Oklahoma and eventually settled in Amarillo, where her family still lives today. When I asked her of her experience after 9/11, she said there wasn't too much backlash in her town—she and her family were among the only Muslim Arabs inhabiting the small town. The most striking part of our conversation was when we discussed why she thought Americans still harbored hatred for Muslims and Arabs.

“They hate because they do not know nor do they understand the religion of Islam. For example, the show “All American Muslim” on TLC was an opportunity for Americans to see everyday Muslims. When it started showing, Lowes pulled its advertising because people complained about the company providing advertising for a show about Muslims. The show ended up getting cancelled because many Americans refused to watch it.”

“Why do you think Americans refused to watch it?”

“Because,” she said, “it humanizes the enemy and then Americans would be wrong in their hatred. If they learned Muslims and Arabs were just like them and not Osama bin Laden, then the emotions and hatred projected toward Muslims after 9/11 would be wrong. People don't want to be wrong. Humanizing the ‘enemy’ makes them harder to hate. Just like during slavery; people didn't want to believe that slaves had souls, because then it would be wrong to enslave them. The same goes for Muslims and Arabs. People don't want to watch shows that puts a different perspective on Arabs and Muslims because then the stereotypes would be wrong—no one wants to be wrong.”

I loved this interview because she explained what I also defended in my thesis, that Americans are almost scared of learning about Islam and Arabs because then their original impression would be wrong. And admitting you're wrong is one of the hardest things to concede.

It Brought Us Closer Together

Upon learning that this A&M student lived in New York City during 9/11, I decided to complete the interviews with his. He provided an eye-opening account of that day, and the days that follow 9/11.

Sinjin Rodriguez was born in Alexandria, Virginia on June 24, 1991 to a family of Puerto Rican descent. His family bounced around from Raleigh to Boca Raton and finally settled down in New York, New York—Brooklyn to be exact. His family move into Sunset Park, a neighborhood he referred to as a ‘Puerto Rican stronghold’.

“Like West Side Story?” I asked, jokingly.

“I can sing a great rendition of ‘I Feel Pretty’ if it’ll help your paper.”

“Maybe next time,” and he continued.

His parents divorced when he was young and both remarried. He was raised mostly by his father and stepmother.

“I loved my city. I made sure to tell everyone I was from New York—I still do. I miss my city, I’m tired of this Texas bullshit.”

“Whoa! That’s my state, buddy!” I protested. But he went on to explain.

“There was always something to do, it was so fast paced. I was never bored. We would all just hangout in my neighborhood on someone’s stoop and then everyone would end up at the same stoop. I had a neighbor who lived above my family. His name was Hassan, and he was half-Lebanese, half-Puerto Rican. We were close, I called him Minjin, although he was three years younger than me –we were very close.”

He launched into an explanation of the diversity of the city. I knew about the Burrow system used in New York, but he said the city was further divided by neighborhood and race.

“People identified each other by race. We would always joke with each other—call each other racial slurs, jokingly of course. It wasn’t as taboo as it is here. I can’t make my jokes here, no one laughs. If you knew them it was okay to joke, but if you didn’t, it could be venomous. Neighborhoods were strongholds of ethnicity. Diker Heights is Italian. Bay Bridge is Italian, Muslim and Asian. Rockway Beach is Irish, Astoria is Greek. Spanish Harlem is Puerto Rican, Peruvian, Ecuadorian. Harlem is predominately African American. Bay Ridge, sections are Arab—65th and 3rd till 75th and 3rd have lots of hookah bars, Atlantic Avenue has a lot of Arabic speciality stores. Flat Bush area also. I could go there and navigate like I never left.”

I could see that, and I was even getting specific street addresses in this interview. I know exactly where to go for hookah in New York next time I go.

“I noticed when I got to Texas (he left New York his junior year of high school) that race is taboo here because people haven’t been as exposed to it.”

I can understand the ‘Texas Bullshit’ comment now; it must have been hard to move from a city of many cultures, to a state like Texas with its not so great racial history.

The next thing we talked about was the ‘Big Day’.

“Never has there been an event that tied together the city of New York like 9/11. I had just turned 10 and was in my 5th grade class at PS 176 School, Ms. Nogara’s class at 69th and 13th street. I couldn’t help but notice that day the teachers were running around in a panic. Kids picked up on the idea that something was wrong. A kid went home early, and normally the mentality was ‘oh you lucky bastard! You luck shmuck!’—yes we talked like that in 5th grade. We were New Yorkers! Anyway, more and more kids started going home. We started to panic and teachers were struggling to hold their composure. They weren’t supposed to tell us what happened but then someone let it slip that the World Trade Center was attacked. Everyone had someone who was tied to those towers. It was chaos. This big bully I had always had trouble with, an Italian guy named Sal Comodo started crying, and I thought, this could be really bad. They eventually had to close the shades because we could see the cloud of smoke from our school.”

He stopped and said quietly,

“It still gives me goosebumps, just talking about it. So at this point, there were about 10 kids left in the class. My dad came and picked me up. On the way home he said ‘I gotta tell you something, something really bad has happened and its going to change how things work. I’m taking you out of school for a few days. I was out of school by 9:30 A.M. on 9/11. As we were heading home, the 2nd plane flew into the other tower. My family and I watched TV together and watched the towers fall.”

New York was the only that mattered to me, because it was my city, it was all I knew. Those towers were something that had been around for forever, it was something I saw everyday in the skyline. It was weird to not see it when I looked toward Manhattan. Made it feel wrong.

At first, everyone wanted to know who did it. Who were we going to blame? We were New Yorkers, we were passionate about protecting our own and wanted revenge. When it came out that an Islamic Fundamentalist group, tensions became high. What made it worse, and I honestly believe this, was the media. They showed clips of ‘Arabs dancing in the streets of New York’. It didn’t make sense to me, wasn’t logical for them to do that. New Yorkers would have jumped them if that had happened our streets! I had a

TON of Muslim friends. All of whom were equally devastated that something had happened.

Then word came that it was Osama bin Laden's fault. We were all about getting him but we didn't want any more loss of life. American lives especially. Our first instinct was to support it. But the longer it took, the less we supported the war in Afghanistan. We were the most powerful country in the world, how many more people did we need to lose to find that one man?

And then we declared war on Iraq. They went with the premise that we were fighting a war on terrorism. But they ended up occupying nations that didn't want our presence in the first place. It just intensified anger and hatred toward America.

The main thing I want to point out is that there was ignorance and hatred toward Muslims and Arabs, they are a very misunderstood group of people that we don't want to learn about. But in New York, it was different. New York is diverse. Muslims and Arabs in America suffered the same attacks, everyone knew at least one Muslim. If we wanted to blame all Muslims and Arabs, then we would be convicting our neighbors and friends of something they did not do.

I had a friend named Rami, who's father worked at the World Trade Center. He didn't know where his dad was all day. His dad finally came home at 10 at night, covered in dust and bits of people. Everyone is going to blame a whole group of people, when really they just suffered the same attacks as the rest of America.

My aunt actually quit her job a few weeks before the attack because they had moved their office too high in the World Trade Center. My uncle was supposed to fly the plane that crashed into the second tower—he had taken that flight off instead. Thank God he did.

There was anti-Muslim, anti-Arab sentiment, not in the beat the shit out of you kind of way. Ethnic slurs were thrown around, we had more ammunition on our Muslim or Arab friends. Everyone was hurt by the attacks. You wanted to be angry, but you knew better because they went through the same thing as you. They were also New Yorkers.

People in south are more close minded to Muslims. They've been indoctrined to believe that all Muslims are the devil. I left New York for Dallas, TX my junior year of high school, and heard so many subtle, behind-your-back racial comments. There was racism towards everyone, Obama got elected and I heard 'President Nigger Face' describe him multiple times by kids in my high school.

There were a lot of lasting effects on New Yorkers. For a time, we were the kindest people in the world. Eventually that faded out, but it really brought the city together. The racial stigmas are worse down in Texas than where the 9/11 attacks actually occurred. I

know people who lost loved ones in the attacks, and they still go out to our old football field and play ball with Muslims and Arabs. There are no more grudges.

There was equal anger toward the government from New Yorkers. We thought, they couldn't have done anything to prevent that? The greatest country in the world was unable to track down four planes that penetrated two towers and one of the most heavily guarded buildings in the nation? (Pentagon). Conspiracy theories were more popular in the days after 9/11 than Anti-Muslim or Arab sentiment. The hatred did not linger, it went away.

The best step to overcome the hated and stereotypes is to get some sort of international experience. Get the hell out of the country and experience things you wouldn't normally experience. If you're going to stay in one place, you're going to adopt that attitude and culture, not because you want to, but because it has been engrained in you. To break that cycle, experience what's outside. It makes you appreciate your culture more, lets you make your own decisions about the attitude you want to have.

This New Yorker's honest opinion is that a person should be judged on their actions, not their ethnicity or religious ideologies. It's a touchy topic for New Yorkers, still have those goosebumps from earlier. I was directly affected by that day; there was a smoke cloud outside my house for two months. But I do not blame ALL Muslims and Arabs. “

I then briefly touched on the mosque near Ground Zero event.

“Me personally, thinks there's no fault in having a mosque near the towers. For those who lost someone it could be a much more sensitive topic. But, It was NOT Islam that specifically killed your loved one, it was the actions of a few deluded individuals.

For us to deny the right to build a mosque near Ground Zero, that makes Al Qaeda win—it's exactly what they wanted us to do, turn against each other like that. To deny a religious group the ability to build a house of worship= that's a deterioration of a cornerstone this country has been founded on.”

This interview provided an excellent insight from the perspective of someone who was actually in a city that was attacked on 9/11. His experience after 9/11 differed from my own. Ironically, the city that lost so many of its own, banded together and for the most part, did not blame the Muslim And Arab community. They were also New Yorkers who lost a friend or family member that day, and the actions of few were not the actions of all Muslims and Arabs. In Texas, so far removed from the attacks, the hatred and stereotypes linger.

Overheard in Aggieland...

The following are a small number of quotes I received from Muslim, Arab and non-Muslim/Arab respondents (who had instances because they 'looked Arab'):

“My name is Osama, yeah you can imagine the reactions I get with that one.”

“After 9/11 when we were in the 6th grade other kids kind of kept their distance from me. I remember one student even used to tease me by saying "Osama yo mama" every day.” (This young woman is of Indian descent)

A Pakistani male said, “At Dukes (a local bar), two white dudes called me "Al Qaeda", I don't think you want to know what my response was [haha]”.

“My roommate and I had an argument yesterday. She claimed that Obama was a Muslim. When I tried to explain that he wasn't, she wouldn't budge. I asked why it mattered if he was or wasn't, there's freedom of religion in this country so anyone can be president. She said that an Arab or a Muslim should not lead this country because they hated America so much and those who hated our country shouldn't lead it. I had to end the conversation there or else I couldn't live with her any longer!” (non-Arab, non-Muslim, female)

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