An Introduction to Islamophobia and Anti-Arabism
Illumination Project Curriculum Materials

By

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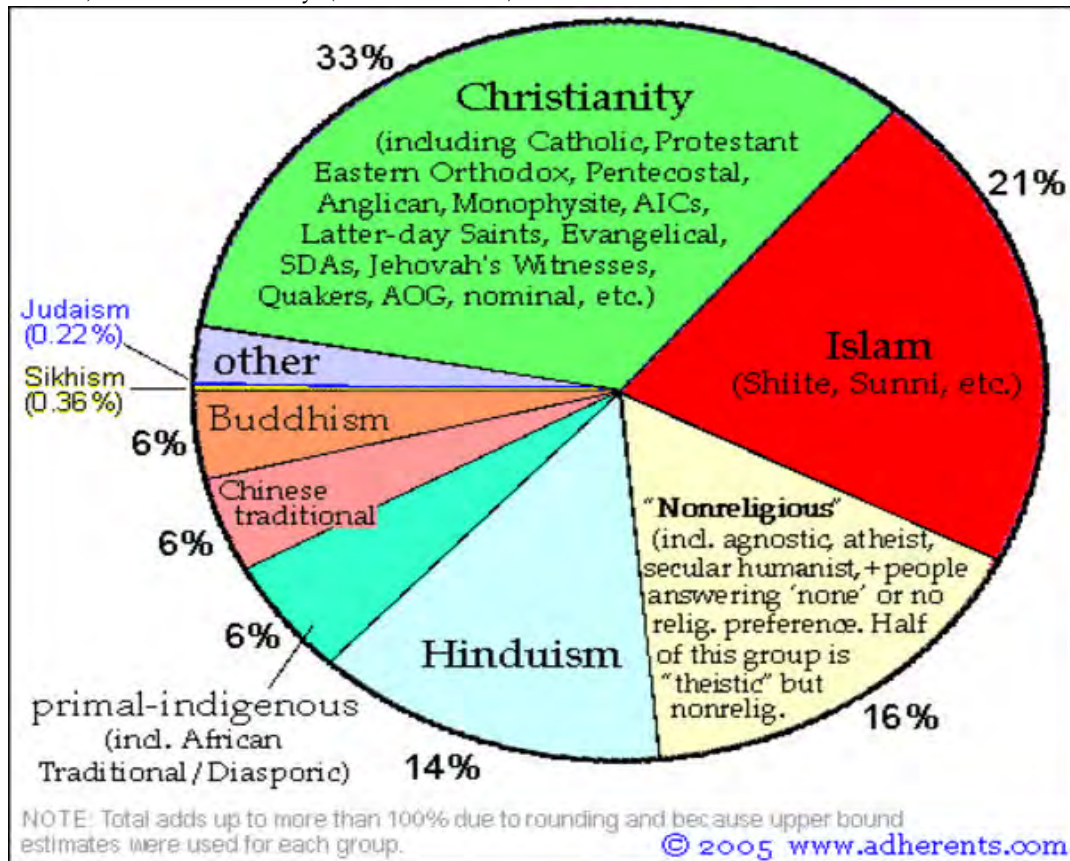*Portland Community College*
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INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia is a form of bigotry and hostility targeted at Muslims, and more generally at those perceived as "Arab." Like all stereotypes, this one is made up of gross over-generalizations. Further, within the context of the social stratification system in the United States, both Islamophobia and "Arab" have been racialized. This means that the underlying assumption is that both Arabs and Muslims are a single racial group.

In order to debunk the stereotypes and the associated bigotry, we need to grasp the reality of who is Muslim and who is Arab.

Who Is Muslim?

Anyone who follows the faith of Islam is a Muslim. Just as anyone who follows the faith of Christianity is a Christian. Muslims are spread across the world (*see maps*). Islam is the second largest religious group (est 1.6 billion) after Christianity (est 2.1 billion).

Major Religions of the World
There are an estimated 7 million Muslims in the United States ([American Muslims Demographic Facts](#)). The demographics of the population by race and ethnicity is :
African Americans 24%
Arab Americans 26%
South Asian Americans 26%
Other 24%

Present across 74% of these Muslim Americans are "Whites" as a racial group. As we can see, the Muslim population is racially and ethnically diverse both across the world and within the United States.

Who Is Arab?
Like the Muslim population the "Arab" population is tremendously diverse racially and ethnically. The term "Arab" is actually a linguistic term that refers to people who speak Arabic. There are approximately 300 million people in 22 Arabic speaking countries in the "Middle East" and Northern Africa.

What is the Arab World? The Arab World consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Iran and Turkey are not Arab countries and their primary languages are Farsi and Turkish respectively.

Arab countries have a rich diversity of ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. These include Kurds, Armenians, Berbers and others. There are over 300 million Arabs. - [Facts About the Arab World](#)
The "Middle East" itself includes Arab countries from Egypt to the Persian Gulf, Israel and Iran. Iran is actually Persian, and Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India are considered South Asia. Turkey is sometimes considered part of the Middle East and sometimes part of Europe.

Challenging Stereotypes
Obviously, the above information confounds our cultural understanding of both Muslims and Arabs. The stereotype in the United States is that Arabs are Muslims and that they constitute a distinct racial group. The truth is that Arabs are a racially diverse people who speak Arabic, some of whom are Muslims. Further, that Muslims are racially, ethnically, and nationally a global population - some of whom live in Arabic nations. Further, the largest populations of Muslims are not found in the "Middle East," but in South and Southeast Asia. Namely, in Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh ([Islam by Country](#)).

Islamophobia
As succinctly discussed by the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#), Islamophobia consists of the following beliefs:
- Islam is monolithic and cannot adapt to new realities.
- Islam does not share common values with other major faiths.
- Islam as a religion is inferior to the West. It is archaic, barbaric and irrational.

- Islam is a religion of violence and supports terrorism.
- Islam is a violent political ideology.[i]

While the points above are an accurate depiction of Islamophobia, it is generally combined with Anti-Arabism. In other words, Islamophobia intersects with and legitimizes prejudice against Arabs. The larger stereotype is that all Muslims are Arabs, and Arabs are violent and "terrorists."

Islamophobia and Anti-Arabism Is Alive and Well in the United States

There are numerous examples of how these prejudices have played out within the recent history of the United States. For example, on April 19, 1995, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. However, the early wide spread speculation was that "Arab terrorists" had bombed the building. Certainly there has been a renewed animus in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001. Further, the launching of the "War on Terrorism" with the highlight on al Qaeda, and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, has brought increased animus against "Arabs" and "Muslims." This has refueled longstanding prejudices in the United States.

While deeply embedded prejudices are at the heart of both of these forms of bigotry, they do not exist solely within the minds of the "uninformed." They are reflected in the interlocking aspects of cultural beliefs, and institutional practices and policies.

We can observe these "biases" represented in both the entertainment industry and from the so-called information media. We saw its power in the recent Presidential campaigns with the claims that Obama "palled around with" terrorists, and supported "Muslim extremists." Even the repeated stressing of Obama's middle name - "Hussein" - was thrown out to inspire fear (and sometimes provide "proof") of his Muslim origins and connections. All of these were blatant calls to Islamophobia.

However, it is not just the media or political campaigns who call up and fuel these stereotypes. Other social institutions have embedded discrimination into a variety of formal processes.

The passage of the U.S.A.P.A.T.R.I.O.T. Act (*acronym for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism*) which provided wide reaching changes to numerous aspects of existing law supposedly targeted at "terrorists," actually institutionalized racial profiling against "Arabs" and "Muslims." The impacts of this legislation and other changes to law have stretched from FBI investigations, to spying on Mosques and civil groups, to monitoring libraries and requiring certain types of student tracking by colleges and universities. While these are examples of what is referred to as "institutionalized discrimination*," they are legitimated by inspiring Islamophobia and Anti-Arabism in the general population.

Institutionalized discrimination refers to the embedding of inequality within the various social institutions, formal policies and practices, and informal operations of day-to-day life.

All of this plays out in individual people's lives. On the one hand, we have the case of the arrest of a woman in Douglasville, Georgia for refusing to remove her headscarf in the courthouse (CNN, 12/23/2008). On the other, we have the increasing presence of White extremists within the U.S. military (SPLC, 12/14/08)

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Conclusion

Islamophobia and Anti-Arabism are interlinking forms of prejudice and discrimination that are prevalent within the United States. These prejudices are like other forms of stereotyping that employ broad cultural and racial generalizations that target a part of the population for disparate treatment on both a personal and collective level.

Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Resources

Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism Book Excerpts from the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Islamophobia Watch: documenting the war against Islam

Making Islamophobia Mainstream: How Muslim-bashers broadcast their bigotry. Steve Rendall and Isabel Macdonald. Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) 12/2008.

Bipartisan Islamophobia Frustrates Muslim Voters. Anil Mundra. NPR. 10.22/2008.

Anti-Arabism. Wikipedia.

Setback for Arab-Americans. Jack Tapper. Salon. 9/17/2001.

A Bibliography of Anti-Arab Discrimination, Stereotyping, and Media Bias. Arab-American anti-discrimination Committee. (ADC)

American Gulag -- A Record of Anti-Arab Bigotry in America. Website of articles and resources.

100 Years of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotyping. Mazin B. Qumsiyeh. Originally published on The Prism.

Islamic World - religion and history.

Islam Map Set. Different maps and information regarding the global Muslim population

Facts About the Arab World

Islam by Country. Wikipedia.

USA PATRIOT Act. ACLU. 11/14/2003.

2008 Hate Crime Survey. Human Rights First.

FBI 2007 Hate Crime Statistics.