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Islamophobia: The Conservative Solution that Backfired

America has had plenty of waves of prejudice throughout its history, from the relocation of Native Americans to segregation. However, in modern times the new wave of prejudice has become the trend of Islamophobia “unfounded hostility toward Muslims” (Johnston 166). Islamophobia has become a growing trend in American society since 9/11. Many terrorist attacks since 9/11 like the Boston Marathon bombing, and the attack at Ft. Hood in Texas have been used as justification by many Americans to perform a variety of hate crimes toward the Muslim community. However, these hate crimes have not stopped terrorist attacks from happening and is only making the situation worse. Many Conservative leaders have abused this trend of islamophobia for their own political gain, and their messages have only helped grow the hate toward the Muslim community. This along with other unavoidable circumstances has helped create the perfect storm of hate and misunderstanding that is only strengthening our enemies abroad while weakening ourselves.

This trend of Islamophobia can easily be established with a Pew Research article written by Katayoun Kishi. Within this article is a graph that shows “Anti-Muslim assaults” since the year 2000. What’s interesting about this graph is that it shows that between 2000 and 2001 the amount of “Anti-muslim assaults” increased from only 12 in 2000 to a staggering 93 in 2001 (Kishi par. 1). However, this staggering figure can most definitely be accounted for by the negative views toward the Islamic community many Americans had in the aftermath of 9/11.
What is truly staggering is how the amount of “Anti-Muslim assaults” failed to fall back to anything below 26 assaults in three years after 9/11, and how they have been on a steady increase since 2007 as over 63 were reported in 2010, and 91 in 2015 (only two assaults away from the levels reached in the aftermath 9/11)(Kish par.1). These levels are expected to increase yet again for 2016, this is according to the Southern Poverty Law Center as “over 30 cases of anti-Muslim incidents in the five days following the presidential election alone”(Kishi par. 6). These numbers beg for the question why didn’t these numbers for “Anti-Muslim assaults” fall after the year 2001, and more importantly when discussing islamophobia as a recent trend, what could account for this steady increase of the assaults from 2007 until now?

One of the key conditions of islamophobia has been the dehumanization of the Muslim community. In their article "The Mai Lai Massacre: A Military Crime of Obedience." Herbert C. Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton, discuss how the Mai Lai Massacre that occurred in the Vietnam War could have been an act of obedience to higher authority rather than a random act of violence. Within this article the idea of “dehumanization” is mentioned which is basically taking the status of human being from the victim, by taking the status of being a human away from the victims those who harm the victims are much less likely to second guess their abuse(Kelman, Hamilton, 141). Terms like “raghead” and “radical” are used toward the Muslim community and these terms strip the Muslims from their category as human and makes it easier for ignorant people to victimise them. Another example of dehumanization is the N-word, which made it easier for whites to discriminate against and enslave blacks throughout American history. Dehumanizing terms like these have without a doubt made it easier (subconsciously) for people to perform hate crimes against the Muslim community.
Another one of the most important conditions that has lead to the trend of Islamophobia has been the exploitation of the fears that many Americans have about Islam by conservative leaders and media members (Johnston 167). This condition is discussed deeply in the article “Combating Islamophobia” by Douglas Johnston. In this article he supports this claim that conservatives exploit their followers fear of Islam by referencing a 138-page report by the Center for American Progress which says that at least seven conservative organizations have “collectively contributed over $42,000,000 to exploit the fears and ignorance of Americans about Islam” (Johnston 168). Johnston also references Brigitte Gabriel who was an evangelical (a popular protestant movement) with connections to the Christian Broadcasting Network and founded the organization ACT! For America (169). Gabreil, when speaking in February of 2006, stated “America and the West are doomed to failure in this war unless they stand up and identify the real enemy, Islam,” and described “every practicing Muslim,” as “a radical Muslim” (Johnston 169). Other articles reference examples to this condition as well. David Belt, for example, has many examples of Conservative leaders and media members exploiting their followers fear of Islam throughout his article “Anti-Islam Discourse in the United States in the Decade after 9/11: The Role of Social Conservatives and Cultural Politics.” Evangelical leader and Friend of the Bush-Family, Franklin Graham is one example used by Belt, as Graham stated “I believe it is a very evil and wicked religion,” when asked about Islam (211). However, a more key example of conservatives exploiting their followers views is used by Johnston who gives the example of former House of Representatives speaker Newt Gingrich. Gingrich arrogantly described the Muslim practice of Sharia as “a mortal threat to the survival of freedom in the U.S. and in the world as we know it” (Johnston 168) Sharia is muslim law coming from the book of
the Quran, and the fear that Sharia will eventually be implemented into the constitution is what David Belt calls the “Green Scare” (Belt 212). This fear is considered irrational by Belt and for obvious reasons. Mostly the fact that the Muslim population accounts for “a mere eight-tenths of one percent of the U.S. population,” and it would be near impossible for a population this small to implement their religion into law in a country composed of mostly Christians (Belt 220). So why make your followers/supporters fear the Muslim law of Sharia? According to Belt the conservative leaders exploited the fear of Muslims and their culture to gain political support. Belt argues for this claim by explaining how most of the “Green Scare” was brought into the public eye by conservative leaders after the election of Barack Obama in 2009 and was especially prominent before the midterm elections of 2010. Belt also uses the example of Gingrich in his article, especially a film Gingrich made with his wife in 2010 titled *America at Risk: The War With No Name*. In this film Gingrich warns his followers about certain “Radical Islamists” inside America that are going “to impose an extraordinarily different system on us”—to “replace American freedom with Sharia” (217).

This practice of exploiting the fear of Muslims by conservative leaders to gain political support continued even after the midterm elections of 2010. In March of 2011 Fox News Channel host Glenn Beck made a connection between the Democratic Party and the “Green Scare” by warning to his viewers that America is “being divvied up” by the “uber left” and the “Islamicists” (Belt 214). And in his Presidential campaign in 2012 Rick Santorum contributed to Islamophobia as well by calling “creeping Sharia” a “huge issue” and an “existential threat to America” (Belt 216). However none of these conservative figures contributed to Islamophobia as much as Donald Trump. Trump is a man who built his entire campaign on discriminatory
rhetoric such as “Build that Wall” and proposing Islamophobic bills such as a “Muslim ban.” He also is a man whose National Security Adviser Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn uses islamophobic rhetoric such as referring to the Islamic world as “cancer,” and explaining to his many twitter followers that fear of Islam is “justified”(Levine par. 1 ).This strategy by conservative leaders, even if it is obviously irrational, definitely helped in the election of Donald Trump as it must have made it tough for undecided voters to not vote republican if they were convinced any of this conservative islamophobic propaganda. This is because all the propaganda was hostile toward the supporters and leaders of the Democratic Party, and liberals were rational enough to not support this islamophobic propaganda. Therefore, it was made pretty clear that if you believed in the “Green Scare” or any other type of islamophobia you were almost required to vote Republican, or in your mind you risked the Muslim population replacing the constitution with Sharia.

What is not understood is why these many followers and viewers of these conservative leaders and media members are so willing to agree with something as irrational as the “Green Scare?” Maybe the best answer to this question lies in another condition to islamophobia, and that is the fact that “nearly half of Americans report not knowing anyone Muslim” (McCollum 18). This is understandable as Muslims account for a very small percentage of our population. However, what’s interesting about this phenomenon is how different the views are that are held by those who know a Muslim compared to those who do not. This information can be found in “Pew Research polls, which show twice as favorable an attitude toward Islam on the part of those who actually know a Muslim than among those who do not”(Johnston 172). This lack of exposure to Islamic culture by a huge portion of our population along with the harmful political
tactics used by conservative leaders and the many dehumanizing words used by these leaders have been the main conditions that have lead to many of the islamophobic views held by many Americans, and without a doubt contributed to the increase in “Anti-Muslim assaults” since the year 2007(Kishi). These views have encouraged many to practice hateful behavior toward the Muslim community, and with this hateful behavior comes a lot of implications that people may have not considered.

One of these Implications is the extreme amounts of bullying that many Muslim Youths face on a daily basis. According to a study by the Council on American-Islamic Relations which surveyed over 600 students, 55% of Muslim students reported experiencing bullying related to their religious identity, while nationally about 22% of all students report being bullied(McCollum 14). This high bullying rate must create some resentment in Muslim youth toward their peers. And these Muslim youths are the exact recruits ISIS is looking for as “the ISIS message is particularly attractive to a large population of young Muslim (mostly) men in Europe who find it systematically hard to find work, impossible to be accepted, or to avoid the constant attention of police”(Graham par. 9). Now, I understand that the quote says “Europe” but these same reasons European Muslims join ISIS apply to American Muslims as well. Therefore, by practicing Islamophobic actions as a nation we are ignorant to the fact that these same actions make our fellow Muslim Americans feel unaccepted, and by doing this we are making Muslim Americans more likely to become radical. We are actually supporting the same enemies that we are at war with overseas by being islamophobic.

Not only do islamophobic actions support ISIS and other similar terrorist organizations, but they obviously hurt our relations with the American Muslim community as well. This is not
only important because these people are a part of our country and deserve our respect, but they also are vital in our fight against terrorism. The American Muslim community has not only “been instrumental in uncovering a significant number of Al-Qaeda plots against the U.S.” but they also have an enormous amount of influence in the Middle East which could be used as a great advantage to the U.S. military (Johnston 168). Therefore, it would seem that these counterproductive conservative movements like Islamophobia have done nothing but hurt The United States and they reveal how corrupt the American political system is. Think about it, if about half of the American population is willing to support leaders who unjustly preach hatred toward an entire religion, who’s to say that even worse political strategies develop? Much worse consequences are in our future if our leaders value votes over common sense.
Works Cited


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