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9/11's Impact on American Muslims

Discrimination is sadly a worldwide problem towards anyone regardless of ethnicity and color but in different parts of the world, the severity of racism may vary. In the United States, pivotal events, such as 9/11, caused a permanent change in how the American public views Muslims. The day the Twin Towers were bombed impacted the lives of Muslims by causing them vast discrimination through stereotypes, violence, and a transformed worldview. Would Muslim individuals still be treated the same as present day time in the event that huge historical events such as 9/11 had not occurred? With the use of professional articles, a connection can be made concerning the matter of increased discrimination against Muslims in the U.S after 9/11.

This paper bring attention to Muslim Americans and the impact on their lives caused by 9/11. Just over 20 years ago the infamous Twin Towers and World Trade Center were attacked by a terrorist group identifying as Islam. The terrorist attacks famously known as 9/11 exponentially rose the amount of discrimination damaging the lives of Muslims throughout the world. Although Islamophobia has already been around before 9/11, with this research, we have discovered that the discrimination has affected Muslims with physical and emotional trauma redefining their passage through life with bias and stereotype. According to MSW Program Director of University of North Dakota, Carenlee Barkdull, in *Experiences of Muslim in Four Western Countries Post-9/11*, "Muslims suffer immense sadness at the human toll caused by terrorism but must also live with the fear of increased stigma and discrimination" (Barkdull 140). The impartial justice of Muslims has created an infinite toll on their bodies and mind. The prejudice is dispassionate creating unnecessary stress all rooting in racism originating on

September 11, 2001. Action towards this topic must be pursued to stop the Islamophobic events that continue to haunt Muslim Americans even after 20 years have passed.

History of Islamophobia in the United States

The topic of Muslims in the United States has been very popular since the attacks occurred, but Muslims have been a part of the country for a long time. According to a Southern Poverty Law Center project called Learning for Justice, “the first clearly documented arrival of Muslims in America occurred in the 17th century with the arrival of slaves from Africa” (Learning for Justice). It is considerable to say that Islamophobia could have been around since the 17th century on account of rejection to practice freedom of religion for slaves. It is also projected that the exclusion to practice is a form of discrimination foreshadowing the discrimination today.

The term Islamophobia is “an intense fear or dislike of Muslims” (Barkdull 140). The term was created well before the 1990s directly describing the intense bias unfortunately exponentially operating in the United States since the early 2000s. The alarming ways to discriminate against Muslims found is very heart breaking when conducting the research for this project. Databases and outside personal accounts on bias can be found throughout the research and is very infuriating. It is important to acknowledge that since the attacks, the bias revolving around Muslims consist of slander, like “terrorist” and accusations of extremist attacks. It is also important to know that the bias is only bias and not the truth behind Muslim individuals or their community. Being part of the Islamic community means being part of the second largest religion with over 1.6 billion members consisting of both native-born and immigrants (Barkdull 141). The Muslim establishment has inhabited the United States well before 9/11. The reason behind

the bias makes the prejudice ludicrous considering American racists were abandoning other Americans for religious purposes and appearance.

Acts of Discrimination

Undoubtedly, one of the main reasons for Islamophobia following 9/11, has been fear for it created a disparity in Islamophobia. The anti-Muslim climate spread across the United States and onto surrounding neighbors across the seas, but it was not as harsh. The chain reaction of the terrorist attacks included multiple types of violence including attacks on mental health, physical attacks on Islamic buildings, and personal attacks on Muslim individuals. Research found in *Experiences of Muslims in Four Western Countries Post-9/11* presents, “Australian Muslims have had it easier than American Muslims. I think we have less fear in our hearts... I felt that Muslims in America didn’t have that sense of confidence. It was dented.” (Barkdull 146). Comparatively, 36% in Canada feel they are biased towards Muslims years after 9/11 (Barkdull 140) and 58% of Americans feel Muslims face more discrimination according to the Pew Research Center think tank (Pew Research Center). The difference in discrimination severity could be analyzed concluding the disparity in culture and political perception between countries. Countries around the world understand the point of view of Americans but choose to not discriminate as harshly as the United States. Having an outside perception of the situation allowed for mindfulness. It is without a doubt that America would have the same ideas if the biased citizen was able to step back and look at the whole picture instead of having negative attributes.

Following the events of 9/11, the discrimination endured by Muslims started immediately and continued for many years leading up to today. As the media broadcasted the attacks,

immediate reactions from non-Muslims watching the coverage included verbal harassment. Non-Muslims individuals recited “Some Muslims blew up the Twin Towers... You Muslims blew up the Twin Towers.” and “You are terrorists... Go back where you came from.” (Barkdull 144). The association of all Muslims with the attacks left Muslims in disbelief, anger, and shock. The variety of harassment did not stop escalating into physical and personal violence. New America accounted for an attempt to strangle a Muslim woman with her headscarf when she delivered food to a man’s home (New America). Magnified examples of anti-Muslim incidents developed to be exaggerated even after over 10 years. In 2012, “A high-velocity air rifle was fired at the Muslim Education Center in Morton Grove while worshippers were inside breaking their Ramadan fast” (New America). The actions of resentment for the Muslim presence in the United States shows the lack of respect. The perceiving bias and malicious intent from Muslim antagonists.

Aftermath of 9/11

Consequently, the observations on American behavior over the last 20 years has proved the violence on Islam followers. New America’s Muslim Diaspora Initiative accounted for 763 anti-Muslim incidents between the years of 2012-2018, not including incidents occurring immediately after 9/11 or current statistics (New America). The hate Americans felt would eventually lead up to a “1,600 percent increase in anti-Muslim hate crime incidents in 2001” reported by the FBI as mentioned by Vox Media (Williams). Alternatively, although the increase in Islamophobia was at its peak, many Americans felt sympathy towards Muslim Americans. Neighbors were concerned for their Muslims nearby residents completing “random acts of kindness” by offering a safe place to stay the night of the attacks (Barkdull 149). It may seem

that the public was inconsiderate towards Muslims but its escalation in discrimination also escalated a raise for awareness on the Islamic religion. According to Vox, “Many Americans visited a mosque for the first time, often attending information sessions on Islam in which Muslim leaders explained that Islam is a peaceful religion that does not condone terrorism” (Williams). Behind a racist American will always be more Americans who believe in equal treatment. Discrimination is only powerful if the discriminated party lets affects have power. Showing signs of positive action created a safe space in Muslims lives. Yet, negative statements and actions stay with an individual’s longer than positive affirmations.

On account of constant discrimination, Muslim Americans came across an unconceivable aftershock years after 9/11. The copious amount of prejudice withstood was bound to cause a serious of mental health concerns such as serious rates of anxiety and depression caused by discrimination (Barkdull 140). The United States Muslim population has been living in the fear of harassment over their religion causing unnecessary stress to their daily lives. The difference in their lives before and after 9/11 is a drastic change. Muslim Americans recall life as “women and men remembered being less restricted in their movements and less wary of scrutiny in public spaces, and the women were not fearful of observing religious dress codes within their particular faith traditions” (Barkdull 144). The Muslim American lives were similar to the lives lived by white Americans. Their attitude in life was more freeing. Subsequently, life turned into acts of self-isolation and restricted movements following 9/11 (Barkdull 146). The causation of fear affected both Muslim Americans and non-Muslim Americans. The difference between the two is that the fear from Muslims was actively brought by Americans. No American, Muslim or not, should feel fear in their own country from their own people.

Small Survey on Ongoing Bias

Apart from the evidence found by professional articles, evidence was conducted in a small classroom setting on their implications of Muslim discrimination. The survey included 8 college students ranging from the age 18-19. They were asked a series of questions with yes or no responses and short answer. The survey concluded that 100% of students believed 9/11 created bias towards the Muslim community when asked. One student responded with "People were confused and afraid after 9/11, and needed someone to blame, so they blamed the Muslim community". The survey also concluded that 28.6% of the classroom felt bias towards Muslims and 57.1% have bias or stereotyped Muslims with jokes, offensive language, or even physical actions and 85.7% have witnessed the behavior. Most students heard biased jokes between friends about bombs and have observed offensive stereotypes. There was a 100% response on if students feel that the Muslim bias is still ongoing today. A student elaborated with "The effects of 9/11 were huge, and you can still see it today. Those who blamed the Muslim community back in 2001 likely still lash out today, and they have likely passed on their views to those around them". To summarize, students born after 9/11 occurred are still influenced by Islamophobia, Muslim or non-Muslim. As they grow up, they are subjected to Muslim discrimination. It affects their lives and shapes their actions as they make their way into adulthood. The bias the students have towards Muslims is a consequence of the initial discrimination.

Disapproving Racist Behavior

To begin with, questions have to be asked when dealing with extreme forms of discrimination. One has to believe that they will stay away from all forms of discrimination, but

the reality is that being an individual in America means being surrounded by persuasive influences. Since 9/11, a majority of the United States continue to unacceptably envision Muslims as terrorists. The assumptions behind this have created repercussions dispensed onto Muslims. Controversially, if one still believes in the assumptions, it reasonable to say that they have been influenced and become part of a racist community. Islamophobia is indeed a form of racism. The American culture tendency is to justify actions with selfish religious or political reasons. Believing in discrimination indicates the assignment in a racist category. For most people, it's going to be something influenced by others and not from their own original ideas. Muslim Americans deserve a chance to be heard and appreciated. They are people just like the rest of Americans. Being a Muslim means being part of the Islamic community. Their American title is the same as anyone else's no matter of religious status.

To understand increased Islamophobia, one has to understand the circumstances of a non-Muslim individual after 9/11. The attacks created a mass wave of fear throughout the country. The climate with Muslim countries and the Muslim identifying terrorist group was heated during 9/11. Perceptions on Muslims have started before 9/11 and only got worse because of it. The perspective taking from this situation ultimately determines the quality of life of Muslim Americans. Loved ones were lost serving our country during the attacks. It is understandable to feel fear and a mixed feeling of emotions when the attacks occurred especially if personally involved. Grievance and closure will be needed to move along from personally loss, but it does not make it acceptable to attack all Muslims for the situation. How would someone feel if one was discriminated against over their race, religion, or gender identity? Assumably, it would feel as if someone has devalued you.

Above all, to rise from the negative bias there must be a strong urge to correct negative Islamophobic behavior. A solution to the prejudice Muslims encountered after 9/11 includes seeking information on Islamic communities, like many Americans did when 9/11 occurred. This will allow for an expansion of knowledge of the community. The problem with many, is unfamiliarity with the Islam religion. There are plenty of informative videos, media, and literature on the subject of Islam around the world or specially in the United States. Another solution is to learn about the positive impact American Muslims have concerning extremist violence. According to Learning for Justice, “40% of domestic terrorism plots have been uncovered or deterred with assistance from American Muslims” (Learning for Justice). American Muslims support their country just like any other American. They understand the problem with extremist violence in the United States and are concerned with the matter. Muslims Americans do not justify the negative behavior or the violence that follows their religion.

Conclusion

The weight carried by Muslim Americans in the United States includes a form of discrimination known as Islamophobia. The events occurring in the day of September 11, 2001, created a wave of fear and violence across both non-Muslims and Muslims. Non-Muslim Americans felt threatened by the Muslim presence acting out through emotional and physical violence. Consistent forms of discrimination included verbal accusations of being a “terrorist” and violent actions such as bullets through Islamic Centers. The continuation of the anti-Muslim climate leading to Muslims fearing aspects of their daily lives. Islamophobia has been a part of history and has stayed in the present with us today. The practice of Islamophobia has been

consistent since September 2001 rising since. Without an attack, like 9/11, the increase of Islamophobia would have not occurred changing the Muslim lives in the United States favorably.

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