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Response Paper #3

Many Muslims are all too familiar with being stopped at the airport for extra screening, having their headscarves pulled off as a cruel prank (Eggers 56), or just getting condescending looks and rude comments aimed towards them. Whether they are identifiable by their phenotype or choice of attire, there is really no escaping for them the blatant feeling in the United States that they are unwanted, or have done something wrong. Anti-Muslim feelings, or “Islamophobia” is due to negative media coverage, nativist sentiment in the United States and other Western countries, and people and groups in positions of power setting bad examples. Islamophobia manifests itself in various ways, predominantly through hate crimes, detainment and deportation of Muslim immigrants or Muslim Americans, and difficulty for Muslims to get jobs. Anti-Muslim feelings have largely increased over time, especially post 9/11, and as demonstrated by the election of America’s newest president Donald Trump, they show no signs of slowing down.

Ideally, the main goal of the media should be to inform the public of facts, especially when it comes to the news. However, news stations usually just want to make as much money as possible, and sometimes that means pandering to what the masses want to hear. As Muslims only make up one to two percent of the United States population, they are greatly in the minority (Mohamed). Therefore, it is in the best interest of many news stations, especially Republican stations such as Fox News, to play off the already existing fear that the U.S. is in danger of Muslim terrorist attacks, and that Muslims want to implement their Sharia law into Western ideals and already existing laws. Although these are ludicrous fears because most of the recent terrorist attacks in the West (such as in Nice in July 2016, Brussels in March 2016, etc.) have been carried out by long time citizens of those countries, rather than recent immigrants from the Middle East (Friedman), they are widespread in the Western world. News outlets are taking advantage of these worries, and making all Muslims sound like crazy cult members, instead of peaceful members of a religion. Rather than singling out the extremists like the media does for Christianity, they are conflating Muslim extremists and all other Muslims into one group of evil, scheming terrorists. It has driven people to become suspicious of Muslims, even when individual Muslims have done nothing wrong. The news is not the only part of the media that does this. Movies, TV shows, and other works of fiction frequently dehumanize Muslims, for example, subjecting them to torture and then justifying it by implying that all Muslims are terrorists (Bayoumi 218).

Another main cause of Islamophobia is the nativist sentiment that is prevalent in the United States and many other Western countries. Even though America was founded on the ideals that any immigrant would be welcomed, an idea of white supremacy and xenophobia somehow persists. At anti-Muslim rallies, there have been chants such as, “Go back home!” or “One nation under God, not Allah!” Although this shows the lack of research on Islam and Muslim Americans that the protestors have done (because Allah is how Arabs refer to God), it also shows the attitude that many white or non-Muslim people feel towards Muslims. There is a widespread anxiety that white, usually Christian people have, which is that they are losing their place of privilege to Muslims. White Christian people have always been at the top of American society in terms of their privilege, and many think that Muslims pose a threat to that. This fear is completely irrational, due to the fact that Muslims are in the vast minority in America and could never overpower the rest of America in any way, even if they wanted to. However, this fear still contributes to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim feelings.

In America, we have many people and groups in positions of power, from police departments to politicians to the FBI and CIA. When in one of these positions, it is important to set a good example for the public and whoever may be watching or listening. However, that is not always the case. The New York Police Department, in particular, has implemented spying programs, and essentially has been criminalizing Muslim Americans. The spying campaign secretly logged the activities of Muslims in New York to watch for anything suspicious, when most of them had done nothing to deserve this constant distrust (Bayoumi 151). Meanwhile, politicians, especially republican ones, have spoken at anti-Muslim rallies and endorsed the hate towards Muslims. Rather than educating themselves on what Islam is really about, they often contribute to dangerous rhetoric against Muslims. In one case, a senator even went as far as to say she knew Marines who could “help these terrorists to an early meeting in paradise” (Shadia). The CIA has increased Islamophobia as well, killing many innocent people in the Middle East through issuing drone strikes (Bayoumi 237). By even allowing that to happen, the CIA is essentially telling Americans that Muslims are disposable, and dehumanizing Muslims. Even the government is guilty of discriminating against Muslims, with their special registration program being a prime example of that (Bayoumi 53).

Islamophobia is shown through many ways. Since 9/11, hate crimes against Muslims have drastically increased (Lichtblau). One example of this is the building of a mosque in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Non-Muslims became hysterical at the proposition and even went as far as burning the bulldozers and other equipment that was going to be used to build the mosque. They also spray-painted “not welcome” on a sign announcing the building of the mosque (Severson). That was in response to the building of a mosque, but Muslims meet opposition even when they are just going about their everyday lives. In Washington alone, there have been numerous assaults and arsons targeting Muslims (Map). America also demonstrates its anti-Muslim feelings by detaining and deporting many innocent Muslims. In some cases, Muslims are arrested and detained without being read their rights or even told why they are being incarcerated (Eggers 228). Some are detained for months or even years. In other cases, Muslim immigrants are being simply turned away when they have nowhere else to go. This happens even if the Muslim is an American citizen and has lived in America for many years, or was born in America. For Muslims who are not deported or detained, their lives in the U.S. are still made difficult by Islamophobia. For example, many employers are hesitant to hire Muslims, simply because of how engrained anti-Muslim feelings are in Western society. It is significantly more difficult for a Muslim to land a job than it is for any non-Muslim (Adesina). This forces Muslims to work much harder to find jobs, when they should be getting the same treatment as anyone else, as the Constitution states that United States citizens have freedom of religion.

Before 9/11, Muslims were essentially invisible. After 9/11, they have become hyper visible. The destruction of the twin towers and the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001, set off a wave of Islamophobia that has only gotten worse over the years because of negative portrayals of Muslims in the media, increasing nativist sentiment and xenophobia, and people and groups in power setting bad examples of how Muslims should be treated. With the election of Donald Trump, white supremacists have become more emboldened than ever before to oppose Muslims, among other minority groups. Even people who are not as extreme as white supremacists still exhibit suspicion towards Muslims in America. However, newer generations tend to be more inclusive, and many young people in the United States are working to make positive changes. Hopefully, America and the rest of the Western world can diminish Islamophobia and anti-Muslim feelings in the years to come.

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