

Issue Brief: Middle-Eastern Discrimination in the United States

Key Words:

Equal Employment Opportunity, Racial Profiling, Middle-Eastern, Discrimination, Post-September 11th, Race Identification

Description:

The purpose of this brief is to focus on the shifting perception and discrimination against individuals of Middle-Eastern descent. Particularly, discrimination in the form of **Racial Profiling** and **Unequal Employment Opportunities** has disproportionately impacted Middle-Easterners in the United States since the September 11th, 2001 attacks in New York. Magnifying the issue is the racial classification of Middle-Easterners as Caucasian, rendering them ineligible for protection as a minority group.

Key Points:

- Use of Racial Profiling to discriminate against citizens of Middle-Eastern descent.
- Historic track record of prejudices aimed towards Middle-Eastern descendants
- Surge of unequal employment opportunities afforded to Middle-Easterners in the Post-September 11th era
- The consequences of racially classifying Middle-Easterners as Caucasian

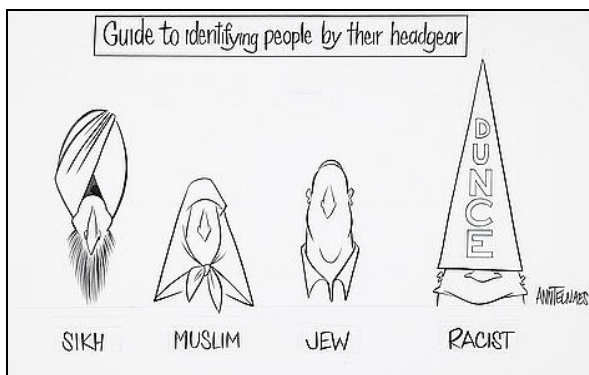


Figure 1: Humor's Edge Political Cartoons



Figure 2: Corky Cartoons: Israeli Settlements

Brief:

Since the attacks of September 11th, 2001, substantial shifts in the perception of Middle-Easterners have plagued the United States. While cases of racial profiling and unequal employment opportunities have surged in the last decade, evidence shows that

discrimination against Middle-Eastern communities is historically rooted. One factor aiding this discrimination (in both pre- and post- September 11th eras) is the racial classification of Middle-Easterners as Caucasian.

The average American is well aware of the discrimination influx following September 11th. Substantial pre-September 11th evidence, however, illustrates that Middle-Easterners in the U.S. have historically been subjected to inequality. John Tehrian cites the example of Majid Ghaidan Al-Khazraji, an Arab-American professor who, in 1978, was denied tenure by his employer, St. Francis College. Upon taking the dispute to court, as an infringement of his civil rights (based off the civil rights act of 1866), Al-Khazraji was informed that, because Arabs are considered Caucasian, he was not entitled to the protections of the 1866 act (Tehrian, 157). The case was eventually overturned (ten years later) but highlighted issues of employment discriminations based on race and the limited opportunities for reciprocity given to Middle-Easterners.

In the post-September 11th era, the number of cases involving racial profiling directed at Middle-Easterners has considerably increased, becoming a point of high contestation. An article published by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) shows that, following the attacks of 2001, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies questioned approximately 5,000 Arab , Muslim, and South Asian men (all legal immigrants between the ages of 18-33) based solely on their connection to countries the government had linked to terrorism. The fact that external characteristics, such as skin color, native accent and name, and traditional clothing (i.e. turbans and jihads) have become synonymous with terrorism has created a springboard for discrimination in an assortment of public spheres.

Airlines, arguably, have received the bulk of scrutiny in the arena of racial profiling. In 2002, CNN reported the story of five individuals who, independent of each other, were removed from five separate flights following the September 11th attacks. All of the individuals were of Middle-Eastern or Asian decent, U.S citizens, and victims of racial profiling by either suspicious co-passengers or pilots. The end result was an indirect restriction of basic rights, reiterated in a statement by Eduardo Cureg (one of the five passengers to press charges): “I will never again feel free to travel in the future. My basic right to travel free from discrimination has been violated” (Phil Hirschhorn and Michael Okwu, CNN). The occurrence of racial profiling against Middle-Easterners inherently decreases mobility and infringes upon basic rights granted to them as citizens of the U.S. These rights are further reduced by the fact that Middle-Easterners remain classified as Caucasians and do not receive the same benefits and protections as other minority groups.

An example of a domain where Middle-Easterners fail to receive the safeguards of other minorities is Equal Employment Opportunity. Because Middle-Easterners are federally classified as Caucasian, the available assistance is not equivalent to that of other minorities. Furthermore, the fact that the average salary of a Middle-Eastern citizen is 39,000 dollars a year (1,000 more than the average American native), makes it difficult to support claims of unequal employment (Camarota, 10) . However, discrimination is present—and is primarily seen in the passing up for promotions and job advancement. In 2003, Bassem Youssef, an Arab-American who worked for the F.B.I., claimed he was blocked from working on matters related to 9/11, despite his credentials and experience in the department. While the F.B.I. did not discriminate against the hiring of Arab-

Americans, the argument was that Youssef, who received accolades for his work in the past, was deliberately passed up for a position related to September 11th matters because of his Arab-American background. For many Middle-Easterners, stable and lucrative job possession only adds to the difficulty they experience when trying to fight unequal employment opportunities.

Although discrimination in the U.S. against Middle-Easterners has historical roots, in the wake of September 11th, racial profiling and unequal employment opportunities have disproportionately impacted Middle-Easterners. Aided by the classification of Middle-Easterners as Caucasian rather than a minority group, recent years have seen a drastic flux in the breadth of discrimination.

General References:

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