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Issue Brief: Bi/Multiracial Middle Eastern Americans

Keywords:

- Post 9/11
- Crime
- Hate
- Religion
- Terrorism

Description:

Mass media and the attacks of September 11 engrained in many Americans a single vision of Middle Easterners, portraying all as Muslim terrorists. Middle Eastern Americans face more discrimination today than ever before and hate crime rates continue to rise against them, forcing many to abandon their cultural and ethnic identity.

Key Points:

- Hate crimes against Middle Eastern Americans are five times higher than before 9/11.
- Assumption that all Middle Easterners are terrorists, muslims, or Al Qaeda.
- Loss of culture and identity.
- Consequences of terrorist attacks and anti-muslim sentiments.

Brief:

Attitudes towards Middle Eastern Americans have changed significantly since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and continue to change rapidly given the current circumstances in Syria, the rise of ISIS, and jihadist extremism that are covered by media daily. These attitudes are further complicated when a Middle Eastern American is also bi or multiracial and may find themselves confronted with not only the stigma of terrorism, but also with whatever stigma their second or third race may carry. As seen with the “ethno-racial pentagon” model constructed by David Hollinger, Middle Eastern Americans are classified as “white” on the U.S. census, but when viewed through the lens of the “color dichotomy” model they classify as “people of color.” Middle Easterners from countries such as Israel where people tend to have

lighter skin color and eyes and are predominately Jewish may have an easier time escaping negative stigma's such as being labeled a terrorist because of their perceived "whiteness."

Kim Kardashian, whose father was Armenian and mother is white, is a fairly complex example of how society can view different biracial Middle Easterners. Kardashian has spoken publicly of being proud of her Middle Eastern heritage, however, many people do not view her as ethnic or a "person of color" for her Armenian heritage, but rather consider Armenia a European country, making her white. Opposite the white view, further confounding her ethnic image is her embrace of the African American culture and her interracial marriage, leading many to believe she should be considered a person of color. Whatever she is perceived to be, ethnic or white, it is clear that she isn't affected by the negative stigmas of being Middle Eastern. Someone that has darker skin and is Muslim may have a much harder time avoiding such classification, and it is this combination that will be focused on.

The current topic of immigration of Syrian refugees gives a fair idea about American attitudes towards Muslim Middle Easterners. America has become increasingly polarized after September 11, and seeing the more recent Muslim extremist attacks such as Charlie Hebdo in France and the San Bernardino shooting in California, the polarization is heading to extremes. In his campaign for president, Donald Trump, along with 25 governors, has promised to ban all Muslims from America as well as to close the borders to immigrants on his first day in office, and his overwhelming success in the primary polls seem to respond to many Americans fear driven views of Muslim terrorists. However, what will become of the immigrants who aren't Muslim, but are mistaken to be? Spreading the radical view of banning an entire group of Middle

Eastern people gives an equally radical view that all Middle Eastern people are Muslim radicals, when, in fact, there are many different Muslim religion sects like Shia, Sunni, Druze, and Sufis, and do not associate with the idea of radicalism, and the three main religions in the Middle East are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Yet, with the idea of banning Muslims in America floating in the political sphere, what will become of the attitudes towards not only Muslims, but Middle Easterners already here?

Hate crimes spiked by 1,600 percent against American Muslims after the September 11th attacks, up from 28 incidents in 2000 to 481 in 2001. While crimes against Muslims are lowering, crime rates against them are still five times higher than they were in 2000, and many crimes are wrongly committed against Middle Easterners perceived to be Muslim. Shortly after the San Bernardino shooting in 2015, Vanita Gupta, head of the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice, stated "Similar to what we saw after 9/11 community members and advocates have reported an uptick in hate-related incidents targeting Muslim Americans, as well as those perceived, rightly or wrongly, as being Muslim." Indeed, mass media and the actions of small extremist groups have lead to the incorrect assumption that most Middle Eastern Americans are radical Muslim terrorists.

While hate crimes against Muslims spiked in 2001, they fell far behind 1,043 anti-semitic crimes against Jewish people, but even farther still behind 2,899 hate crimes against African Americans, who had the highest rates of hate crimes committed against them. In 2014 the FBI reported that religious hate crime rates were slightly down, except for Muslims, which rose by roughly 2.5 percent, and while still leading in rates, hate crimes against African Americans

dropped to roughly 2,023. How do biracial African and Middle Eastern Americans fare in current societal views? The statistics might be telling. With most racial hate crimes committed against blacks and a continuing rise in religious hate crimes against Muslims, that are many times mistaken to be anyone with Middle Eastern origins, it would appear that the answers is “not well.”

Are these people destined to be both discriminated against and tied to terrorism forever? It seems to be too soon to have an answer, however, there is an avenue that can be taken to try to escape the generalizations, although it doesn't come without severe drawbacks. In an attempt to dissociate with these ethnicities many people will try to “whitewash” themselves, leading to a loss of cultural and ethnic identity. This leaves biracial Middle Eastern Americans with a choice that many Americans couldn't imagine facing: either forget who you are, or be discriminated against for it.

Images:

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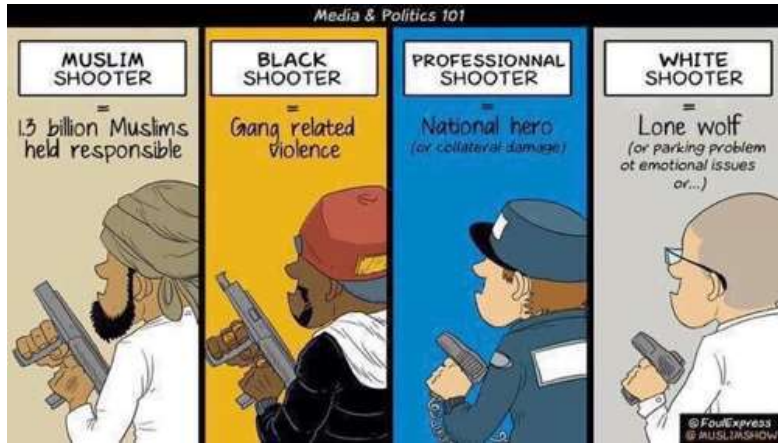


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