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Middle Eastern Americans as Victims of Violence in America Post-9/11

Key Words: Hate-crimes, violence, racial-profiling, identity, Muslim, Middle-Eastern, Arab.

Description: After 9/11, there has been an overall increase in violence committed against Middle Eastern/Muslim Americans. Additionally, the perpetuation and normalization of this violence has been sustained due to the positive reinforcement cycle between public structural violence committed by the government and private acts of violence committed by individual citizens.
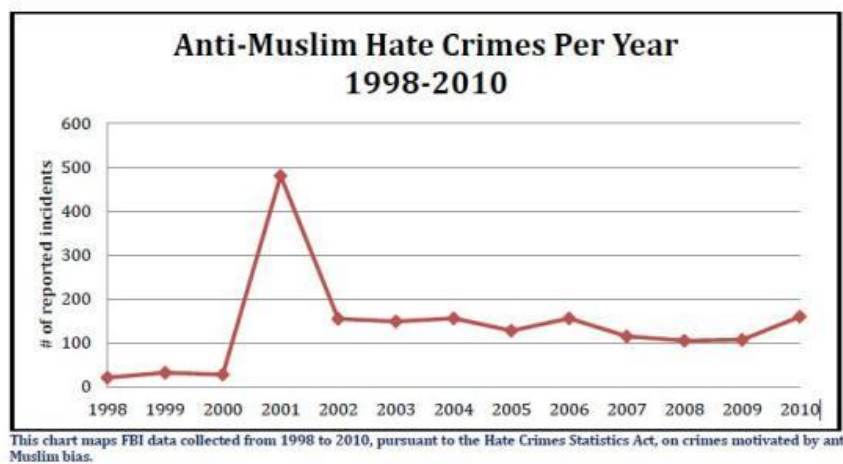
Key points:

- After 9/11, there was a massive reshaping and reframing of the Middle Eastern American Identity.
- This minority group became a target of waves of violence and hate-crimes fueled by bigotry and intolerance.
- The existence of a broader type of structural violence committed by the US government in the form discriminatory policies, which disproportionately singled out Middle Eastern Americans, in turn promoted and encouraged individual, private acts of violence.
- Although having steadily declined, violence against Middle Eastern/Muslim Americans still exists to this day and must be addressed and remedied through a re-examination of governmental policies.

When addressing the issue of violence committed against Middle Eastern Americans, it is imperative to address the event that forever reshaped the identity of such a group in American society: September 11, 2001. Moreover, not only did Middle Eastern Americans increasingly become targets of racially motivated violence, but the concept of their identity was transformed as well. Misperceptions gave rise to an

expansion of the labels associated with the group. Middle Eastern and Arab Americans, who are about two-thirds Christian, were now becoming associated with Islam and other ethnic and religious groups such as South Asians and Sikhs respectively. (Elliott, 2006) Because misperceptions and generalizations have caused misidentification and targeting of non-Middle Easterners, these other groups must also be included due to the initial perceptions of those perpetrating the violence. Additionally, a wider definition of violence must be adopted as to include both private acts of physical violence committed by individuals and public acts of structural violence committed by the US government.

After 9/11, anti-Arab/Muslim hate-crimes skyrocketed. Statistics from the FBI showed that while hate-crimes in general had been decreasing, a trend seen through the events of September 11th, the instances of violence committed against Arab and Muslim Americans increased by a dramatic 1600% from 2000 to 2001. (Disha, 2011)

**Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes Per Year
1998-2010**

This chart maps FBI data collected from 1998 to 2010, pursuant to the Hate Crimes Statistics Act, on crimes motivated by anti Muslim bias.
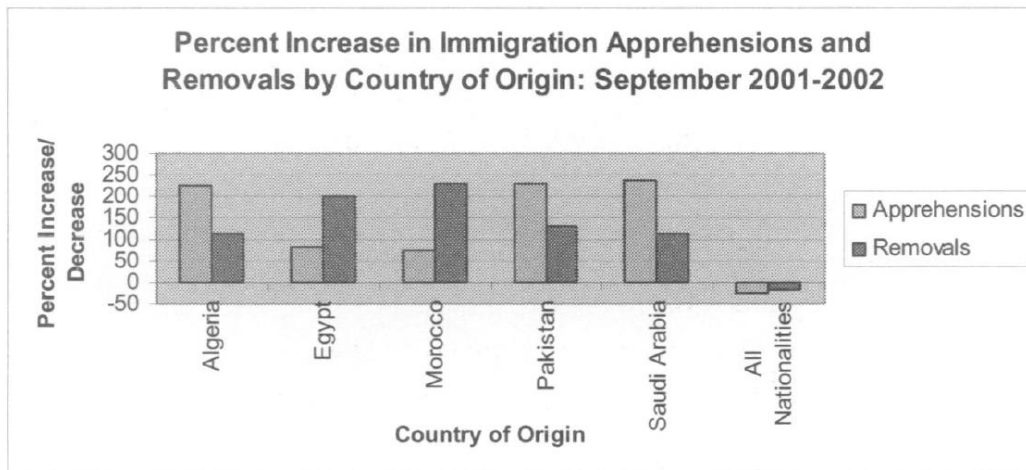
Department of Justice Report 2011

While it was often acknowledged that underlying conditions of prejudice often exist, the sharp increase in hate-crimes against this group was alarming. (Disha, 2011) Studies on

intergroup conflict in the United States often emphasize demographics, economics, and political factors as driving forces for violence committed against certain minority groups. (Disha, 2011) However, in the case of hate-crimes committed against Middle Eastern Americans, the unprecedented nature of the terrorist attacks created a trigger of fear and mass panic like never seen before in American history, which fueled the violence targeted at Arab and Muslim Americans.

Additionally, the pervasiveness of the individual acts of violence were sustained due to the mutual reinforcement that occurred between them and public acts of structural violence perpetrated by the US government, like racial profiling and xenophobia. (Ahmed, 2004)

Percent Increase in Immigration Apprehensions and Removals by Country of Origin: September 2001-2002

(Ahmed, 2004)

Institutionalization of racial discrimination through federal legislation such as the Patriot Act, deportations, and across the board declines in civil liberties targeted specifically at Arab/Muslim communities in the US were frequent tactics used by the government. This helped to normalize violence committed against the minority group. (Ibish, 2003) The

biased policies enacted by our government officials helped to promote a culture of intolerance and discrimination.

Even now, over 10 years after the attacks, we still see the legacy of this relationship between public and private acts of violence committed against these communities.

www.islamophobia-watch.com

While there has been a general shift of public discourse to Islam, politicians have taken to using the Arab/Muslim minority communities of the United States in general as scapegoats and targets of bigotry. (Hussain, 2012) Moreover, this hate-speech has far reaching consequences. In recent years, there have been cases of violence that were triggered because of views expressed by opportunistic politicians. The top-down mechanism through which political leaders have indirectly encouraged is alarming.

While the frequency of hate-crimes has seen a general decline over the years, pre-9/11 levels have not yet been achieved. (Disha, 2011) In order to further combat such

bigotry and prejudice across the board, there must be a change in discourse and action

with regards to policies and attitudes towards Middle Eastern/Muslim communities.

Because the government and public officials hold such great power when it comes to

shaping public dialogue, the initiation of progress must begin from the top. If those in

power who are shaping politics in the United States could dictate policies and steer the

conversation towards tolerance and open-mindedness, then advancements would surely

be made to combat violence against Arab/Muslim-Americans.

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