

Susan M. Akram and Kevin R. Johnson “Race and Civil Rights Pre-September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabas and Muslims”

Main Point: The United States has targeted Arabs and Muslims as the country’s new enemy, which comes from the social construction of these groups as a race of terrorists. This animosity has been increasing since before September 11th, resulting in hostile changes in law and government and therefore negatively impacting the civil rights of Muslims and Arabs.

Central Issues and Concepts: -The actions taken by the US government against Muslims and Arabs are not considered as racial profiling; however, the legislation and civil rights violations against Arabs and Muslims clearly demonstrate the similarities between this era and the demonization of the Japanese during WWII or of African Americans throughout American history. Muslims and Arabs are the “new” Japanese/African-Americans.

-This process started long before September 11th. The authors attribute the process to: stereotypes, images in the media, the effects of a national crisis, and the effort to gain support for US foreign policy in the Middle East. *Stereotypes:* Arabs and Muslims have been “racialized”, or defined as a race through social definitions, as a race of terrorists. This racialization is a product of extremist group violence, local group violence, and hostility from international crises. *Images in pop culture:* Media and film have portrayed stereotypes about Muslims and Arabs, which are viewed as normal and in accordance with the views of the US population. Political figures have also demonized Arabs and Muslims through rhetoric and public acts. *National crises:* There is a general view that all Arabs and Muslims are the same, and that they all want to “wage a holy war against the United States” (141). Even small acts of terrorism by select groups of Arabs or Muslims have led to large reactions against Arabs/Muslims as a whole. *The role of government and law:* Institutional racism contributes through law enforcement, especially foreign policy. When the government establishes anti-Arab/Muslim legislation, the population follows the sentiment. This concerns mostly foreign policy with organizations such as the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which has targeted Arabs/Muslims for years by trying to remove them from the country through various methods.

Two Key Quotes: “Arab Americans and Muslims have been ‘raced’ as ‘terrorists’” foreign, disloyal, and imminently threatening.” (138)

“Defining race as a process in which racial difference is socially, not biologically, constructed assists in examining the treatment of Arabs and Muslims in the United States; their experiences show the severe damage that racialization can do and offer hope that the process can be reversed.”

Two Questions:

-The article discusses in length the issues in Arab and Muslim demonization leading up to September 11th; however, the aftermath of the terrorist attacks is off-handedly referred to as “simply the latest chapter in this history” (138). Has the effect of the events after 9/11—primarily, the prolonged Iraq war and the recent antiwar sentiments—changed these attitudes?

Racialization and demonization occur when the country is in concurrence with foreign policy, but what happens when the population is mostly against it? Does it have a positive effect or has it made no difference, and why?

-People have claimed that Barack Obama's election as president represents a new step away from racism and towards national pluralism. Considering this article's claim, is the Obama presidency really a move towards tolerance, or are the country's racist attentions simply being transferred to a new target (Arabs and Muslims)? Why does our society always have to have one "target" group?