

# **Part 3: A Professor and Class Examine Ethnicity and Identity**

## **The Muslim American Experience**

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### **Their Entrance Into American Society**

[As the Muslim American population continues to grow in America it will have a larger and greater impact on society, culture, and politics. This paper attempts to develop a clearer understanding of this impact by analyzing the interaction of the American Muslim social networks with the traditional American society on the macro, mezzo, and micro levels. Then the paper delves into the political implication of the growth and increase in political activity of the American Muslim community.]

### **Part 1**

#### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The American Muslim population is increasing in America and its influence on American culture, politics, and society will continue to develop as well. Their assimilation into American society has been greatly affected by many factors including terrorist attacks carried out in the name of Islam. My hope is that studying the formation of the American Muslim identity will have a positive effect on American society by creating a better understanding and provide avenues to accepting this group into America.

In our exploration of the American Muslim experience in forming its unique identity within American society I will use the conceptual framework associated with social networks. Social networks can be defined as “a relatively stable and complex pattern of relationships among multiple interdependent and self-organizing elements” (Morçöl, 2009, p. 45). In an attempt to further clarify social networks, Siegel (2009) evaluated networks based on the network size, ties between individuals, the presence of elites, the overall structure, and the distribution of motivation to identify four specific types of social networks: small world, village, opinion leader, and hierarchy. In each type the individual reacts differently to certain pressures such as the increase in the size of the group, motivation of the group’s leaders, and the amount of participation by group members.

The American Muslim population is a stable group that is tied together by their religious beliefs in Islam. Islam penetrates all areas of an individual’s life, including social, economic, private, and public arenas. Islam stresses the importance of individuals living their lives in accordance to the norms of the group by requiring that all followers must adhere to the five pillars of Islam: 1) the profession of faith, 2) prayer five times a day, 3) almsgiving, 4) the fast of Ramadan, and 5) pilgrimage. These pillars create stability within the group, establish group norms, and shape member’s views of in and out group members, thus creating a “role of social networks, proposing that social embeddedness provides individuals with the resources needed to invest in collective action” (Klandermans, 2008, p. 993).

The American Muslim identity group also relates to the social network concept by creating a social framework for American Muslims to interact within society by having a structure in place with defined groups (mosques) and leaders (imams) within the Muslim community. The presence of this social framework fits well within the specific hierarchy type of the social network concept.

The social network concept is closely related to the social identity theory. The social identity is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. ). Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed the social identity theory composed of three processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. The social identity theory evaluates how an individual relates and interacts within a group and the social network concept focuses on how the individual’s relationships and the underlying social frameworks affect their motivation and willingness to participate with group activities.

The social network concept also is related to organizational identity. Organizational identity is “the totality of repetitive patterns of individual behavior and interpersonal relationships that taken together comprise the unacknowledged meaning of organizational life” (Diamond, 1988, p. 169). The social network concept describes organizations that individuals naturally form to create order in life and the resulting relationships between people in the in and out groups.

## **Macro-level**

According to the American Religious Identification Survey, conducted in 2008, the total number of U.S. respondents who identified themselves as Muslim was about 1,349,000 and showed an increase of 256% from 1990 to 2008. This information demonstrates a significant increase in the Muslim population in the United States, even if their overall numbers are still small in comparison to the total United States population. According to [www.america.gov](http://www.america.gov) members of the American Muslim community are found in all American occupations including artists, filmmakers, businessmen, fashion designers, songwriters, and television journalists just to name a few.

Five characteristics of the Muslim American social network that will have an impact on the interaction with traditional American society are “the influence of grievances, efficacy, identity, emotions, and embeddedness” (Klandermans, 2008, p.992). Islam provides the social network for these characteristics to play out. The social network of the Muslim American group is of the hierarchy type, and the elite leaders within the community must set the tone and motivation of the group and have the support of the local leadership. If the tone and motivation is positive and moving towards assimilation, communication, inclusion, and openness, then these characteristics of the social network will become assets. If on the other hand, the tone and motivation is negative and moving towards isolationism, divisiveness, and creating obstacles, then the characteristics of the social network will become deficits.

Many Muslim Americans “perceive many government counterterrorism, security, and immigration policies to be unfair and discriminatory in their application to Muslim-Americans”

(Schanzer, 2010, p. 40). The perceived discrimination by the Muslim American population has resulted in an increase in tensions between the Muslim American community and traditional American society. An example of such a policy would be “A secret program to conduct radiation monitoring at hundreds of mosques and other prominent Muslim sites in five cities” (Schanzer, 2010, p. 7). This policy demonstrates the isolation of the Muslim population from mainstream American society and provides some validation for the fears and mistrust within the Muslim American community.

United States foreign policy to provide aid to the international Muslim community in the form of financial support, medical supplies, food, clean water, and building infrastructure are great examples of policies that have a positive impact on the Muslim American community. These policies demonstrate that the United States is not at war with Islam and should help calm some of the fears of the domestic Muslim population.

### **Mezzo-level**

At the mezzo-level of society I will discuss the roles of nonprofits in advocating the needs of the Muslim American community. First, I will address the response to the counter-terrorism policies and laws passed in the United States with the intent of restricting and preventing the flow of aid and financial support towards possible terrorist groups by Muslim charities. These Muslim charities responded by “alliance-building, litigation by individual organizations, and other strategies” (Sidel, 2010, p. 306) as a means to confront the restrictions that the United States government imposed on their fundraising and distribution of aid. These organizations have had little success due to the continued terrorist threat and the lack of overall support from other charities that are not impacted directly by the policies.

A second example of nonprofits advocating for the Muslim American community was the public service announcement campaign “I am an American” [which] was created in direct response to the hundreds of hate crimes against Arabs, Muslims, and Sikhs and began airing on television ten days after 9/11” (Alsultany, 2007, p. 596). This nonprofit organization worked to confront the growing number of hate crimes directed at the Muslim American community in the wake of 9/11. They helped to influence the view of traditional American society by reminding them that America is composed of all races, nationalities, and religions. The impact of the ads are difficult to measure and may have contributed to uniting Americans in support in the “War on Terror”, however the impact on the attitude of American society towards Muslim Americans has not been determined.

The third example of nonprofits advocating for the Muslim American community is the Council on American-Islamic Relations which “has sought to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims in the United States, through media relations, lobbying, education, and advocacy” (Alsultany, 2007, p. 599). This multipronged approach to advocating for the Muslim American community has had a positive effect on the views held by traditional Americans by demonstrating that “Arab and Muslim Americans are in a position of having to display their ability and willingness to assimilate in order to have a chance at becoming American cultural citizens” (Alsultany, 2007, p. 608). This also attempts to influence and encourage the Muslim American community to assimilate with the American culture.

## **Micro-level**

At the micro-level of society I will discuss five culturally competent practices one should employ when working with the Muslim American community. First, one must be aware of the history, beliefs, and religious practices of Islam to overcome American society's "ignorance of Muslims [that] may play a role in this negative stereotyping" (Penning, 2009, p. 278). The Muslim American's daily life revolves around their religion and this has an impact on the social, public, private, and family sectors of their life. One who interacts with a Muslim American must respect and be culturally sensitive to their fundamental beliefs.

Second, one must be culturally aware of the perception that the international Muslim community has of America. Salim Mansur (2005) put it this way, "The majority public opinion in the Muslim world has been shaped by the power of the United States abroad rather than by the nature of American democracy at home. The result is a grossly distorted image of the United States among Muslims, even among those who reside in America" (p. 7). United States foreign policy within international Muslim communities has had and continues to have an impact on how Muslim Americans view the traditional American society. If Muslim Americans perceive that the United States view's international Muslim communities in a negative light, due to their adherence to Islamic practices and beliefs, then these views will have a negative impact on the will of Muslim Americans to assimilate into American society.

Third, one should be culturally aware of the misconception that the Muslim American community can be identified by its ethnic component. Love (2009) wrote "In terms of religion, these Middle Easterners belong to several denominations of Islam as well as Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and other religions as well. Neither can Muslim Americans be easily categorized: there are Muslim Americans in every demographic group" (p. 408). The Islamic religion crosses all racial and ethnic lines. One should not think that just because an individual is from the Middle East that they must be Muslim.

Fourth, one should be culturally aware of the presence of many denominations of Islam just like in Christianity. One cannot assume that all Muslim Americans hold the same religious views. There are varying degrees of the strictness to the adherence of the five pillars of Islam as well as the main division between Sunni and Shia Muslim sects. These differences may cause some friction within the Muslim American community.

Fifth, one should be culturally aware of some Muslim cultural traditions that may appear strange to a member of traditional American society. There are certain cultural differences such as the clothing that women wear, the acceptable relationships between women and men, the role of women and family, and different holidays and festivals celebrated within the Muslim American community. One should be culturally sensitive, aware, and demonstrate respect for these differences and not be condescending, but rather accepting and open to these new experiences.

## **Part 2**

### **Theme Based Research**

The role of the Muslim American community will continue to increase into 2050 as their number of members rise and as long as terrorism is associated with this group in the minds of most members of traditional American society. The impact of the Muslim American community on American society will be voiced through a growing political constituency, increasing political engagement as a way to express grievances, and an increase in anti-Islamophobia advocacy organizations.

Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world. The number and percentage of Americans that identify with this religious belief system is increasing. As their numbers continue to rise, they will have a greater voice within the representative democracy in the United States because politicians will begin to court their vote and thus become advocates for their needs. Their growing numbers also increase the chance that more individuals from this group will obtain elected offices. The growing political constituency of the Muslim American community will begin to have an impact on public opinion, policies, and laws.

As the Muslim American community increases its political engagement there will be many positive impacts on their community and the traditional American society. Schanzer (2010) identifies three positive impacts of the increased participation of the Muslim American community: “1) grievances are brought into the public sphere and clearly articulated so they do not fester and deepen, 2) disputes are resolved through debate, compromise, and routine political procedures, and 3) political mobilization leads to ever-increasing numbers of Muslim-American leaders speaking responsibly about difficult issues on both the national and international stages” (p. 41). Not only does the political engagement benefit the relationship between the Muslim American community and the traditional American society by assimilating to one of the core fundamental characteristics of American society, but also the increase in political engagement will also benefit the United States on the international stage when developing foreign policy and reducing tensions with Muslim countries.

Another benefit of the growth and increased political activity of the Muslim American community is “the one that appears best to fit the available empirical data on the trajectory of anti-Islamophobia advocacy organizations [...] the model of most interest groups of all sorts in the United States, characterized by legal activism, cooperation with law enforcement and legislative lobbying, without claiming access to racialized remedies” (Love, 2009, p. 419). As the political activity of Muslim advocacy organizations continues to increase, one would expect these organizations to follow the same strategies of other advocacy groups. By following the examples of the traditional advocacy groups, the Muslim organizations are assimilating to the traditions and culture of traditional American society. The growth of the size and effectiveness of these Muslim advocacy organizations, within the framework of traditional American society, aid in breaking down the misunderstanding, stereotypes, and fears represented by Islamophobia and contribute to the acceptance of the Muslim American community into traditional American society.

### **Implications for Society**

As time continues to advance forward to the year 2050, I suspect that the Muslim American community will continue to move closer to being accepted within mainstream American society. The transition will not be without difficulty. However, as the Muslim

American community begins to find its voice, direction, and avenues to publicly express its grievances, impact domestic and foreign policy, and overcome the stereotypes associated with Islamophobia, their community will increasingly be accepted into American society.

Schanzer (2010) stated, “Yet, there remains work to be done. Our shared goals are to enhance trust, increase public safety, and create a positive social environment for Muslim-Americans. With capable leaders acting in good faith, we believe these goals are achievable” (p. 45). Since the Muslim American community follows the hierarchy type of social networks, then the actions of the leaders within the Muslim American community are vital to successful integration into traditional American society. As these leaders begin to interact, communicate, and build relationships with others outside of their community, then the rest of the Muslim community should follow suit and begin the process of assimilating with traditional American society.

The American society has the opportunity to gain much from the assimilation of the Muslim American segment of the population such as an increase in religious diversity, greater understanding of the international Muslim community, and a powerful weapon in the “War on Terror”. The impact of the Muslim American community on domestic and foreign policy will benefit all of America and her standing within the worldwide arena.

### **Part 3**

#### **Self Reflection**

My original impression of the Muslim American identity group contained some correct and incorrect information. I was under the impression that the Muslim American community was much larger than what was revealed by my research. I assumed that there was a significant number of Muslims within the African American population, in addition to individuals from the Middle East and Asian geographical locations, and would result in a total percentage of the United States Muslim population in the 5 – 8 % range instead of less than 1 %. I was also not aware of the considerable amount of difficulties that Muslim nonprofit organizations faced beyond what other nonprofit organizations were dealing with. I assumed that the government’s policies impacted all nonprofit organizations equally. However, I believe that the difficulties the Muslim nonprofit organizations face are related primarily to the specific areas in the world that they provide aid and receive contributions from and should not be confused with the impression that the policies were intentionally directed at them for antireligious, ethnic, or racial reasons.

I understand some of the contributing factors related to Islamophobia such as fear of the unknown, stereotyping, and misinformation. I have personally been on the receiving end of these same factors when I was traveling in the Middle East, but instead of Islamophobia there was a sense of a phobia of Americans. This phobia was overcome and broken down by working side by side with these individuals, daily communication, development of personal relationships, and helping people that were in need. I believe that the best way for traditional American society to triumph over Islamophobia is for individuals to put forth the effort to lend a helping hand and get to know someone who is a member of the Muslim American community.

I realize that there is the perception within the Muslim American community and the international Muslim community that American policies are in some way anti-Muslim. I believe

that this distortion and false perception can be corrected by several means. The Muslim American community could embrace the avenues within American society to express their desires and grievances in the form of running for public office, government jobs, creation and involvement in interest groups, voting, and involvement in other traditional community activities. The United States government should continue to distinguish between terrorist and their associated activities from the Islamic religion and the Muslim community as a collective body. Also the United States government should work closely with the Muslim nonprofit organizations to provide communication, services, aid, supplies, education, and other material support in exchange for the increased burdened placed upon these organizations by the government in the “War on Terror”. I think that the key to a successful foreign policy in the Muslim world will depend on the full backing of the American Muslim community here in the United States and their ability to impact these policies, voice their viewpoints, and demonstrate their support to the international Muslim community.

I also think that the Muslim American community should make a concerted effort to not isolate itself in its own small communities within larger communities. This tendency to group together and not being willing to step outside of their comfort zone will only continue to perpetuate misunderstanding and stereotypes that persist between the Muslim American community and the traditional American society. I think that the initial steps toward assimilation must begin within the Muslim American community and be embraced when received by American society. Other minority groups in America have taken this difficult step and succeeded. I hope that the same can be said of the growing Muslim population within America.

### **Self Discovery**

The following are a list of five questions that I would ask an individual that is a member of the Muslim American community:

1) What groups, besides Muslim groups, do you belong to and identify with? Why?

I would ask this question because I would want to evaluate the individual’s response as a way to determine how much the individual has assimilated with the traditional American society. I would be able to determine if the individual is isolating themselves within the Muslim American community or are they integrating with their society.

2) Do you think that a Muslim will become president of the United States within your lifetime? Why?

Their response will shed a light upon how the individual perceives the majority of Americans’ attitudes to be towards Muslims and to what extent these views may change over time. Their response will also reflect how much faith they have in the traditional avenues, within American society, to express one’s grievances.

3) Do you feel that American domestic and foreign policies unfairly single out the Muslim community at home and abroad? Why?

The individual’s response would, to some extent, show whether their personal identity is more closely associated with the Muslim community or with the American Society. Other

aspects of their response could demonstrate their knowledge of these policies and the resulting effects on the individual and their community.

4) Have you ever experienced Islamophobia and how did you deal with the situation?

Their response will demonstrate the effects of Islamophobia at the individual level, the rate of occurrence, and whether instances are increasing or decreasing. The second portion of the question will reveal the coping mechanism that the individual used to respond to the situation. I am interested in where the individual sought assistance. Was the assistance provided from within the Muslim American community or did the assistance come from within the American society? This information can be used to assess their level of assimilation into American society.

5) Do you think that the religious practices of Islam can coexist within the bounds of the United States' constitution?

This question goes straight to the heart of the issue of whether or not the Muslim community in America desires and is compatible with the most fundamental aspects of the traditional American society. Americans naturally assume that the Muslim community wants to assimilate and adhere to our traditions, culture, and society and this question confronts this basic assumption.

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## **The Jewish Vote: Understanding the Need for Minority Representation**

**Sarah Darby**

Religion is a prevalent part of society today and many American's identity. Religious practice can be capable of powerfully altering one's perspectives, motives, relations, choices, and overall associated identity. Aside from religion, political affiliation carries strong identification as well for many Americans. When put together, religion and politics can create definite "in groups" and "out groups". In today's modern American society, Judaism is amongst one of the more common religious faiths; however it is a clear minority when compared to Christianity. Judaism often revolves around a specific community, and is known not only as a religious identification but an ethnic classification as well. The Jewish faith establishes its ability to encompass its followers in a community often centering around Temples and Synagogues. The Jewish community, though differing widely within the sectors of the practice, carries a tight knit ability to align strongly together when voting in political elections. In the Jewish population, Jewish Republicans tend to be a large minority and lack representation because of their opposing political alignment compared to the general composed identity of the group. In this paper the focus of the American Jewish population will be viewed as both a religious and political minority, with the Republican Jews suffering the most from lack of governmental and political officials in office.

## PART ONE

### [Theoretical/Conceptual Framework]

Minority groups can be defined in a theoretical and conceptual framework as “a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group.”(dictionary.com). Minority groups have been studied in various aspects because of their indefinite ability to distinctly differ from the considered “majority” group. Groups often hold together through a common bond or a common identity. When examining the Jewish community as a minority in politics, several areas devise this distinction. First, the very apparent separation that Judaism as a *religion* is a minority in comparison to both Christianity and Islam. Second, the lack of Jewish representation in government is clear by the numbers. However, the Jewish population is better represented in Congress than in the overall population, percentage wise, but still a clear minority compared to other represented identity groups (Masci, 2008). A third minority I will be discussing partially is the Jewish Republican community. Because of the high correlation between Jews and liberal Democrats, the Republican Jewish community makes a very small portion of the overall Jewish community. The Jewish vote has and does continue to lean left, but the amount of Jews whole align with the GOP is growing and differs with each election. The minority status of American Jews in faith and political representation encompasses the whole Jewish community, but especially affects the minority of the minority group: Jewish Republicans.

In recent studies, the general American public has been under the impression that minority groups make up a larger proportion of society than they actually do (innumeracy about minority populations). Jews are one of the minority groups that are made out to be larger than actual numbers determine. This is partially because of the threat many people fear from minority groups, but also because of the ability to perceive most minority groups as more recognizably different than mainstream majority groups. In a study that polled American’s estimates of how many Jews resides in America, those surveyed guessed the Jewish population to be about 40% when in fact the true figure was more like 2% of the population (Nadeau, 1993). Because of this inaccurate perception, the size of minority groups is seen as greater because it is easier to readily identify those who look different or part of a group identity that differs from the overwhelming majority of the general public. This is certainly the case with American Jews, who are outnumbered in *both* religious affiliation and political representation.

Social Identity Theory can be defined as “the part of a person’s self concept that is determined by the group to which the person belongs” (textbook), or also as defined by Tajfel and Turner as wanting a positive distinction of value for one’s own group by achieving a strong self image that can lead to the strengthening of the overall group identity (Turner, 1979).

Organizational Theory is the collective identity derived from individuals of a group working as an organization, or as “relating to the identity of the organization as a whole” (Cornelissen, 2007). This can be explained through minority groups like the Jewish community because of its strong unification. Jews align together enough in left side politics to almost completely sway the group towards a candidate based on the majority’s political beliefs. This is powerful enough of a social identity because of individual’s ideologies collaborating that America has termed it the “Jewish vote”. Jews social align together enough to form a group identity, and moreover, a political identity. This is why Jewish Republicans stray so far from the overall stereotyped group liberalism.

In comparison, social identity and organizational identity can be interchangeable in certain aspects of group identity. According to Cornelissen (2007), the primary definition of social identity is “Individuals' knowledge that they belong to certain groups together with the emotional and value significance of that group membership”. This is also stated to be the secondary definition of organizational identity. The primary definition of organizational identity according to the same source is “The shared meaning that an organizational entity is understood to have that arises from its members' (and others') awareness that they belong to it” and thus is the secondary definition of social identity. One identity secures the other identity, tying the individual to the group and the group to the individual. So for American Jews, the exchange between the Jewish individuals taking part and shaping the Jewish community and the Jewish community shaping Jewish individuals is a fairly even transaction within the identity group.

**[Macro- Level]**

On the macro level, Judaism is a prominent religion widely practiced in the world today. There are approximately 15,145,702 Jewish followers worldwide. Of this, 5,302,245 Jews reside in America (ARDA, 2010), making the American populations percentage of Jews roughly 1.8% according to 2005 survey. Numbers taken from different religious poll show that the Jewish population was on the rise in America (in 1990 there were 5,982,529 followers and in 2000 there were 6,141,325 leaving America with a steady +158,796 (2.7%) increase) (ARDA, 2010) but when compared to Christianity and Islam, Judaism is a distant minority.

The number of Jews who hold official government positions in America’s 111<sup>th</sup> Congress is 45. There are 13 Jews among the 100 Senators. There are 32 Jews of the 435 House Representatives. Of these, there are only two Jewish Republican Senators, and only one Jewish House Representative. Regardless of the consistent clear minority, Jewish Representation has gone up +6.1 % from the 87<sup>th</sup> Congress to now (Masci, 2008).

The final aspect of Jewish affiliation to examine on a macro- level is political association. The below chart from the Association of Religion Data Archives gives The General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) statistics for Jewish alignment:

	<b>Jewish</b>
Strong Democrat	38.1%
	24
Not strong Democrat	28.6%
	18
Independent, near Democrat	9.5%
	6
Independent	4.8%
	3
Independent, near Republican	4.8%
	3
Not strong Republican	6.3%
	4
Strong Republican	7.9%
	5
Other party	0.0%
	0

No answer	0.0%
	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	100.0%
	63

(Political Party by Religion, ARDA, 2010)

The percentage of Jews who affiliate with more conservative, right ideals is significantly lower than liberal left leaning. Noting this minority, and the underrepresentation of Jews in government, the Jewish Republican community is the furthest separated in politics from holding office. However, with all the figures shown for the above minority groupings, many assets are associated with the Jewish population.

The American Jewish identity group has claimed values prevalent to their community for years and years. One asset associated with the Jewish identity is the stereotype that Jews are genetically smarter than other groups. Though there is no scientific or factual information that can actually connect academic traits to the Jewish ethnicity and religion, Jewish Education schools carry very high GPAs and their students go on to graduate with jobs. Career paths are another asset to the Jewish community because more often than not family businesses are passed down through Jewish families. Jewish Americans hold some of the highest paying jobs, as cited by the Jewish Federation of North America

The majority (62%) of Jews is employed full or part time, as was the case in 1990 (61%). More Jewish men than women are employed (68% vs. 56%). Twenty one percent of adult Jews are retired, an increase since 1990 (16%) and a higher proportion than that of non-Jews (16%). The majority of employed Jews (59%) work in management, business and professional/technical positions, compared to fewer non-Jews (46%). The plurality of Jews are in professional/technical positions (41%), noticeably more than is the case among non-Jews (30%). Among employed Jews, men and women are equally likely to work in management, business and professional/technical positions (60% vs. 59%). (JFNA, 2010).

Even with the negative aspects of stereotypes assigned to the Jewish identity group, the positive is the truth in high paying jobs and good educations. A deficit to the identity would be the anti-Semitism still found in today's society.

**[Mezzo- Level]**

The American Jewish population gains the support of a vast amount of nonprofits advocating for the Jewish community and pushes everything from religious and social tolerance to government legislation and political stances. One specific example of nonprofit Jewish organizations working on behalf of American Jews is through governmental support of representatives in Congress. Though as previously mentioned, Jews are a minority in political representation, nonprofits such as the Met Council support legislation brought on by their Jewish congressmen. The Met Council wrote to Jewish House Representative Jarod Polis, (D-Colorado), the following letter responding to his proposed bill:

June 9, 2010

Dear Congressman Polis:

I am pleased to inform you that the Met Council strongly supports legislation you introduced earlier this year, H.R. 4870, the "*Healthy School Meals Act*." As an organization dedicated to advocating for and serving the needs of the poor, Met Council has grown increasingly concerned over the lack of healthy food choices for children from low-income families. In New York City, financially-strapped schools are often

limited in their ability to provide nutritious choices to students in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program (NSLBP). During the school year, students from low-income families rely on the NSLBP for two out of the three meals they eat Monday through Friday. These students should have access to the most nutritious and healthy foods available. Sadly, that is not always the case. H.R. 4870 will provide schools in New York City and across the country with the ability to receive free of charge, healthy foods and provide students with healthy meal options on the food line. At a modest cost, the “*Healthy School Meals Act*” will go a long way in improving the health and nutrition of our most vulnerable students. I applaud you for your leadership in introducing this important legislation and certainly hope that this legislation will be enacted into law.

By way of background, the Met Council was founded in 1972. It is a not-for-profit organization representing and coordinating the efforts of grass roots Jewish Community Councils and citywide and national Jewish organizations. It is the primary advocate for the needs of the poor, reaching out to the isolated poor and elderly, and increasing public recognition of the extent and nature of poverty among Jews through legislative and social advocacy. Created to alleviate the social, economic, housing, and related problems of the poor, working poor, elderly and recent immigrants in the New York City area, Met Council delivers needed services to thousands every day. Its most important task is to ensure that the hungry are fed, that the weak and frail are cared for, that the homeless are sheltered, and that those who are able to work are helped to find employment. Thank you again for your leadership (Rapfogel, 2010).

This letter shows that though the nonprofit group did not produce the idea for the policy, they supported their identity group’s candidate that proposed it in the House. This support helps both the organizational identity as well as the collective political identity of the Jewish community, all through this letter from the Met nonprofit agency.

## **PART TWO**

### **[Theme-based Research]**

Politics plays a very large role in the lives of many Americans and in a part of the American Jewish community. The current role of Jews in American politics is growing, and will only continue to do so in the future. As previously mentioned, Jewish representation has grown immensely over the years. While still a minority, Judaism is showing a larger size following than years prior. This is where the discussion of Jewish Republicans gets interesting because there is a shift starting to show between the assumed Jewish liberalism and growing support for Republican Jews for office.

## **PART THREE**

### **[Self- Reflection]**

Growing up in the tri-state area, I have been exposed to the Jewish faith since a very young age, and frequently so. I believe firmly that the Jewish community can be very tight knit in certain matters of opinion, one being politics. In my experience, Jews follow closely along Democrat lines and often vote with the candidate their local temple supports. My father ran in a Democratic primary against a Jewish candidate, and though my father won, he could not even convince his close friends who were Jewish to vote for him because they aligned so directly with representing their ethnic and religious community. My views on the Jewish culture and the Jewish vote have developed from being raised in the most inhabited area of Jewish people in America (ARDA, 2010). I have always taken particular interest in why Jews remain liberal with their often high financial brackets and self businesses, as well as their level of religious worship. I have always assumed that when someone says they are Jewish, they are a liberal. And, for the

most part, I am usually correct. They have remained true because of the interaction I have encountered with the Jews who have confirmed my beliefs over the years.

Over the course of this research paper, I have learned why Jews tend to vote Democrat. I also have discovered that the Republican Jewish community does exist with growing numbers.

If I could ask a relevant and active Jewish Republican five questions, they would be the following: 1) Why align with the GOP and against the general identity consensus of your religion? 2) What benefits do you expect from having a Republican congressman be Jewish? 3) What legislation do you hope to be pushed through by a GOP Jewish rep? 4) Would you align yourself and your vote with a Jewish Democrat over a non-Jewish Republican? 5) Do you consider yourself a minority? A religious minority? A political minority? Social? One at all?

I interviewed a close childhood friend, Corey, who is a politically active and savvy Jewish Republican. He responded to why he aligned with the Republican party with “Because I am a fiscal conservative. My mom and her whole side of the family is Jewish and liberal and my dad is Christian and conservative. I’m pretty socially liberal- I’m pro-choice and pro-gay rights- but I’m very fiscally conservative and this is more important to me than the social aspect of politics”. When asked if he would vote for a Jewish Democrat his response was no. Lastly, I asked if he felt like a minority and he said “Not really. Maybe in a different area, like the south, I would. But not in the Northeast because of our large Jewish population”. These answers did not shock me. I would not expect a devoted conservative to change his vote over his religion, but I suppose it is possible and does happen.

## **Social Differences and Ethnocentrism within Africa Americans**

**By: Sebastian Santos**

Abstract:

This paper explores the different ways that African Americans have dealt with struggle and how they have overcome discrimination and other social injustices. It focuses primarily on how African Americans see themselves according to other cultures and what type of organizations have been the primary source for justice and equality. On the area of education, African Americans have seen disparities in terms of funding and school amenities and that is why many politicians have started to get more involved with politics to be able to work for their community specific goals.

Part 1:

## Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the idea that one group is superior to another group just because they members of the specific group see themselves as being better individuals with a higher social ranking than the other group. "To judge one culture by the standards of another culture is ethnocentric." (Andersen pg 67, 2005).

When a group sees other with an ethnocentric perspective they are closing their mind and jumping to conclusion that makes them say that they are better or superior from the other group, it also can create situations where ethnocentric views make the group stronger by allowing the members to feel part of a superior group.

Ethnocentrism can make groups go to extremes because they think they are really superior from others and like we have seen in the past these groups can create wars that will be aimed to the destruction of a specific group in order to demonstrate the strong feelings of superiority. This feelings may be also come along with cultural, religious and racial clashes.

In the case of African americans and the ethnocentric view, one can see how african americans may tend to see themselves as a group that is superior to others in specific areas. This is not only visible in the African American community, every other racial group is always trying to compete with others to see how is better at certain tasks. In the area of sports, the African American community has seen themselves as more capable of performing better and having the right attributes and training discipline to be better athletes than Whites, Hispanics and Asians. The reasoning behind this is that there are some genotypical differences between races and African Americans seem to be better at running, basketball, football, etc. With this in mind there has been an increase in ethnocentrism within the african american culture due to the fact they they perform and are better athletes than other races.

Another great example of ethnocentrism within the black community is in the field of music. Excellence in music and great talent has been observed within the group. African Americans have been involved in the music movement for many decades and they have prove that they are significantly more talented in some musical instruments that may just come natural to them while they are expressing their culture with their own beats and vocal styles that can not be matched by anyone.

If a given group is evidently better at something that another group and they can show evidence for it, I would say that they have reasons to have an ethnocentric point of view in the specific situations mentioned above. Although not all group members think this way, there are many others that have an ethnocentric view toward others just because of socio-economical statuses, religion, gender, etc.

Ethnocentrism can be seen as a close brother of the social identity theory proposed by Henry Tajfel and Turner in 1979. The social identity theory focuses on group membership, process and many other relations that are vital for the performance of a group. Tajfel first focused on group categorization, social prejudice and conflicts that arise in between groups and outsiders (Burke, 2006, pg 111-113).

The social identity theory is very close to the view of ethnocentrism when it comes to group identity. Both of these concepts are mainly focusing on the way that the groups see themselves in comparison to others, they both see others as inferior while creating a sense of belonging and importance within the group, Tajfel saw this as a great way to try to explain why many atrocities like the holocaust may have occurred especially since he experienced this as a Jew as the nazis rose to power in Europe. Ethnocentrism and the social identity theory were basically outlaying the differences that sets a group in the inside or the outside of all other groups, its what defines who we are and “who they are” in the area of groups and organizations with an specific purpose and ideology.

Another theory that is very similar to the view of ethnocentrism is the organizational identity theory proposed by Shelley Brickson in 2005. the organizational identity theory mainly focuses on how individuals gain identity to a certain organization, it says that in order for a person to get a sense of identity they first have to work in establishing a strong trust bond that will reinforce the idea that they belong to an organization and therefore making this organization very efficient and very committed to their common tasks.

The way that these two theories are closely related and working with each other along with ethnocentrism is a clear sign that they have a lot in common due to the fact that they all are creating a sense of belonging, more commitment to the groups and favoritism towards the in-group while taking advantage of out-groups and making them look inferior than them. It seems that these are some of the most prominent and effective approaches that one could take when studying group interaction, performance and sense of belonging that may lead to conclusion about why groups act in certain ways and why they make the decisions and changes they perform in all their tasks as a group.

## Macro Level

As of the year 2009 in the United States, the African American community accounts for about 12.9 % of the total population. To be more specific there are about 39'603'844.95 African Americans living in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). African Americans have been great contributors to the United States with african culture, arts, music, food, etc.

African americans have been know for their rich cultural traditions that have been passed through hundreds of generations and which are of great value in the United States.

Within this culture there are many great assets that can be named but in this case we are gonna be looking at five different ones which are the most significant and influential.

Like I said before, African American music has influenced the American culture for many years, there has been a great variety of styles and musicians that have been key players in the development of American culture with the influence of African musical styles. A good example of an African American musician that really fits the description of a great artist is trumpeter and composer Miles Davis. Davis, considered one of the most influential Jazz musicians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. His musical talent influenced many other great African American artists in the United States, reflecting the importance of African American music development in the U.S.

The second asset that is seen as being important too is the influence of African American involvement in sports, in this area they have developed an enormous reputation that has placed them in the top as world champion athletes that are sometimes incomparable to some of the other athletes who are not African American.

Third, African Americans have been of great influence to the southern culture of the United

States when it comes to traditional southern foods. They introduced their own ways of cooking and rich flavors into the southern American cuisine that would have not been there without the influence from this rich culture which has great food recipes that haven't been traditional to their culture for hundreds of years.

The fourth asset is arts. African Americans have their own and unique art that has been very important for the development and free expression of the individuals that belong to this community. Their culture has been reflected in their art and it shows all the struggles that they went through during many years of oppression.

The last one of the assets is mainly I think the fact that African Americans have been lately more dedicated to improve their status in the United States society and this is seen through more involvement in politics and leadership positions that will effectively be beneficial for their community.

At the same that there are assets this community is also being dragged by some deficits that eventually affect their image and status detrimentally. First African Americans may seem like they have a way of parenting where they resort to positive control with cases of parents being punitive, authoritarian and in some cases physical discipline was seen, all this was seen through many studies and experiments that were conducted to study African American parenting in low social economic statuses. (ASA, Longest, Taylor, Lorraine, pg 2-20).

Another thing that I would consider a deficit within their culture is the fact that some members of this community are being easily misguided and sometimes they see others doing bad things and they take it as an example to be in the streets and do illegal actions just to get whatever they want easily or to get a specific position in their lives, this is where involvement in gangs is very detrimental for communities because it disrupts their lives with opportunities and leaves them with no choice other than to be members of violent gangs and drug trafficking. Also there has been a dramatic decrease in homeownership in the African American community, creating more social instability for their culture, along with these comes increased poverty, violence and not having the opportunity to attend school like every single American child should do.

African Americans have been in many struggles through the years, but there has been several governmental policies set specifically to aid them and to improve their quality of lives through agreements and laws that allowed them to have more involvement in their day to day activities.

Back in the 1930's during the great depression the government of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, came out with a plan to restore their economy after the recession, this plan is known as the New Deal. What the New Deal did was that it focused on restoring the economy and bringing to the point where there is an economic boost that will ensure that the economy stays in a fluent and stable state. What is known as the "3r's" relief, recovery and reform, with this in mind they planned to relief the poor and unemployed, recover the economy and make it stable and finally make sure that there was a reform so that there is no possibility of having another major economic depression (Bryant, 1998).

For African Americans this was a great plan because it made sure that with the influence of the leaders of the New Deal they will be assured at least 10 percent welfare and more involvement in politics that like I said before bring stability and direct benefits for the community. Out of this came the well known "Black cabinet" that Roosevelt implemented to help the African Americans.

Another example of a policy that has helped African Americans to get more fair and equal treatment is Affirmative Action.

This policy first introduced by president John F. Kennedy was aimed to stop discrimination and to promote equality in the work and educational areas, it was later superseded by Lyndon Johnson proposal to have all federal contractors practice fair and equal hiring processes where all individuals of different races will have the same opportunities when it came to jobs and educational opportunities ( Affirmative Action, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Right now there are no laws that set back only the African American community, back in the day during the 1900's African Americans were being deprived of using the same public amenities as the white did, this included schools, restaurants public facilities like parks, etc.

The Jim Crow Laws as they came to be known were laws that separated the colored from the whites, they made sure that the blacks had different amenities and that all the benefits that they got were inferior to the ones the whites were receiving. The Jim Crow laws were a form of segregation that was alive in the United States for many years and that were very oppressive for the African American community, probably one of the most detrimental effects of these policy was the fact they black schools were underfunded and ignored by the government, making the levels of poverty even higher and not allowing the black community to educate themselves and to improve their lives.

## Mezzo Level

African Americans started several organizations to assure that there is equality and fairness in their lives, one example of is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This organization has been a civil rights advocate since their beginning, its main

purpose is to make sure that there is equal treatment and respect for rights of colored people. The NAACP has been in the fight for human rights equality since the beginning of the organization in 1909. The organization saw that the Jim Crow laws were racist and decided to take a stand and oppose them by means of organized protests and marches with the aims to stop the segregation period in the United States. The organization also was trying to promote equality for education opportunities and to try to raise the standard of living for African Americans. What the NAACP has done for African Americans has been seen as very influential because they helped to put an end to segregation, the organization raised the standards of living for blacks and made sure that there is equality in every single aspect of their lives. Even though these organizations have done many efforts to help African Americans there are still some gaps in education that can be seen as underfunding for low income and minority schools and racial stereotyping. The NAACP played an important role in the development of the Brown v. Board of Education landmark case.

Part 2:

## Education

Within the African American community and other minorities, disparities of education and workplace areas have been present for many years. In the field of education, African Americans have been in a situation where most of their schools are being underfunded by the state and therefore creating gaps in the opportunities for black children to have an education that has quality and value for the future.

Achievement gaps have been seen in test taking areas where students of other races like Asian, white and Latino scored higher than the average African American. Studies have shown that the way that African Americans have been treated in the educational system has not really allowed them to improve their skills and to better themselves due to the conditions that they are presented with in this environment.

The problem with the educational system and the way that it is funded is that our politicians do not really do what they are supposed to do with funding money and they invest it in the schools where the rich kids go so they can have better education and forget about the other schools in poor neighborhoods where there is not many funding if not at all. When there is low funding for schools most kids which probably live in low living conditions come to school to a place where the teachers are not really qualified to do their job, and why do schools hire these teachers or use them for their curriculum is because of the fact that they do not have the money to pay qualified teachers and what they do is that they use their available teachers to teach subjects that they may not be familiar with, depriving students from optimal learning environments and making them see school as a stage in their lives that may not be too important and that's when kids start dropping out of high school because school is not doing anything for them, and with all this in mind these children see the streets and gangs as being more important and significant than education because they can get what they want without acquiring an education.

Another aspect in education that needs attention is the trend that African American children are getting more involved with gangs and other deviant groups. In cases of schools in areas with

very low income, the probability of children joining gangs is higher than in more privileged schools. One can see why this is true because if you are attending a school with no adequate food to provide a good nutrition and with no good classrooms and limited technology children will see the school as worthless and seek for other ways of fulfillment in their community and this is where gangs step up and make them feel important and part of the community, where they see a more likely opportunity to succeed than to being in school.

## Politics

The African American community has been seeing a great deal of involvement in politics in the last few years and specially now with an African American president leading the nation. Back in the day they started seeing involvement in politics when Roosevelt created the first black cabinet during the New Deal, this was probably the start of African American involvement with politics. “Colossal changes, in fact, have catapulted Blacks from the "back of the bus" into the driver's seat at every level of government. We've gone from zero Black governors or major-city mayors to our first elected governor, L. Douglas Wilder, and our first big-city heads, Carl Stokes and Richard Hatcher. We have witnessed Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas take their places as justices on the nation's highest court. We've watched our political muscle in Congress swell from two Blacks in 1951 to a power bloc nearly 40-members strong in 2001” (Jet magazine pg 1). It is clear that there has been an escalation in black representation in the government in the past 50 or so years, we saw the blacks being oppressed during many years but now they are stepping up and taking a more dedicated role in politics to better reach their goals for their community and improve their lives.

As of right now the political situation for African Americans in the United States is stable with Barack Obama as the president and with many others blacks involved directly with the government, they are senators, supreme court justices, delegates, etc. At the state level it seems that we need more participation form the black community and support for the political parties that will be benefiting them, but lately there has been an inclination for blacks to get more involved with parties that are not particularly working for the improvement of this specific community.

The situation of African Americans in the political world is the same as any other ethnic group when they are trying to get involved in politics. This is that they have gone through three stages where the first one is the protest stage where individuals actually make marches and show their discontent towards the majority ruling party. Second, the empowerment stage, here the party tries to get political recognition and involvement in through friendships and alliances in the political system. The final stage which is the power consolidation one focuses on keeping the party in the playing field and finally gaining total involvement in the political stage ( Kilson, The State of African American Politics, pg 1, 1999).

Part 3:

## Self Reflection

The African American culture is very rich in customs and values that makes it very important in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. I think that these culture has developed in an amazing way because it has been through many difficult times for many years, but with its strong cultural values and determination it has been able to get out of very detrimental situations that were holding their community back. It is a culture that has shown the ability to better themselves and to learn how to cope with others regarding of past situations.

Being from a country where racial variety is very scarce, I have completely changed my way of thinking towards the African American culture. This is because in Colombia, my home country, we have very different attitudes toward the black population, but like I said I have learned to appreciate every culture and stopped making generalizations about them. With the knowledge that I gained from this research I found that African Americans have similarities with my culture because both groups have had to fight for equality and different social struggles for many years.

## Self Discovery:

Even though I had the opportunity to learn many things about the African American community I would like to ask them some questions about their community in general. I would ask them how do you see your community in the U.S? Do you feel like you have the same opportunities as everyone else in your community? Do you see African American involvement in politics as effective as it seems? Is president Obama making a good representation of African Americans in politics?

1. How do you see your community developing in the American 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

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A: I see a lot of change in education, there has been more African Americans getting their college degrees and investing in improving their lives socially so they can actually get better jobs and better standard of living for their community.

2. Do you see African Americans involvement in politics as effective as it seems?

A: Considering that Barack Obama is president of the U.S I feel like there has been great involvement in politics at state levels, working towards the improvement of the race and culture.

3. Is president Obama creating a good image of African Americans in politics?

A: I feel like having an African American as a president has changed the overall image of African Americans involvement in every aspect of the American society. The only thing that has made me hesitate about the president is the fact they the has not been as efficient as we all expected him to be.

Yakima Jacobs was the person that I interviewed, she is a friend of mine and co-worker, she is 33 years old and she is African American.

This answers made it even more clear that African Americans have a strong feeling of hope towards the involvement in politics and the influence that the president has placed in American politics. Also she made it clear that she sees her group as working together to improve their status, making her very proud of being an African American.

To conclude, African Americans in today's society have shown their capabilities to improve themselves and to never give up in any situation no matter how difficult it is. They have improved their education levels, formed organizations to protect their human rights and to create equality and have enormously gained more recognition and involvement in the political field in the past 50 years or so. African Americans have shown that their race is very rich in culture and many other aspects like sports, music, etc.

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## **Muslims in America: Perceptions of Society and the Influence of Media**

**By Clarence Rasberry**

### **Abstract**

Muslim Americans are seen as different and sometimes threatening by American citizens. They are labeled with negative stereotypes and grouped together with little to not attempt by most Americans to understand them individually. After September 9, 2001 the American perception of Muslims was altered depicting them as violent or fanatical. The American media is a provider of most of the misinformation that people receive about Muslims. This is not to say that all media fails at displaying neutrality when focusing on Muslims, but rarely do major media outlets attempt to do so. The major questions to be asked are: Do Muslims see themselves as wanted in America, and how do they feel about their representation in the media. The social perception gained through the readings show that Muslims, youth especially, feel rejected by American society due to their faith. They see no positive representation of their beliefs in the media, and are greeted at times with anger by other Americans. The data gathered offers a look at the feelings of the Muslim community. If American society wants to create a peaceful relationship with American Muslims then people must learn to study and attempt to understand Muslims before they judge them.

### **Part 1**

The Muslim community is one that has had hard times adjusting to the Christian secular ideas within American culture. Perception of them by most American's is negative especially after 9/11, but many Americans rarely take the time to get to know the individuals they assume to know so much about. Islam itself is a religion that speaks of peace and tolerance of others religions and race or culture. Americans have to learn to be fair in judgment and not base their

ideas of a group of individuals upon the actions of a small group within them. We must learn to separate the individual from the religion. (Cooper, M. H. 1993, April 30)

### **[Theoretical/Conceptual Framework]**

The conceptual framework I have chosen for part 1 of my paper is Social Perception of the Muslim community in America. According to Webster's dictionary Social Perception is defined as the process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting and organizing sensory information. (<http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/>) Social Perception is how we are seen by society as a whole. Based on our activities or actions we can be prejudged by others as commonly participating or being involved with those actions. We sometimes base individuals on their dress or social practice. "We often try to simplify the complex flow of incoming info by putting people into useful categories. These classifications help to specify how various objects or events are related or similar to each other." (Aronson, 2007) Through these categories we create stereotypes which we use to easily label individuals allowing for quick judgments of others. The stereotypes we form cripple our understanding of the individuals we label, and can result in the assumption that entire groups share the same traits. That is a problem that is faced by Muslims in America after terrorist attacks committed by extremist leaving many with false perceptions of Muslims and their religion.

"It's going to take a while for Americans to recognize Islam not as a religion of the other but as part of the country's rich, pluralistic religious experience." (Aslan, Reza in Understanding Islam) The most major event that influenced Americans social perception of Muslims would be 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center was committed by militants associated al-Qaeda a Muslim extremist group at the time that was located in Afghanistan. The group is believed to be lead by Osama bin Laden. Whose main motives for the attack are believed to have resulted from continued U.S. support of Israel and occupation of U.S. soldiers within Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War. Two planes were flown into the North and South Towers respectively, a third plane was flown into the Pentagon in D.C., and a fourth plane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania when the passengers resisted their captors. Over 3,000 people were killed in this act including over 400 police officers and fire fighters. (History, 9/11 Attacks Topics) Due to this act many Americans began to exhibit hostile attitudes toward Muslim American's some who are even second generation citizens.

In the Muedini article Muslim American College Youth: Attitudes and Responses Five Years After 9/11 students spoke of the bias against Muslims shown through the media. In December 2004 an incident was cited that students were stopped on an attempt to enter the U.S. from Canada after returning from an Islamic Revival conference. (Muedini, 2009) In the article students speak of the isolation they felt after 9/11 and how many Muslims did not attempt to socialize with non-Muslims. Students stated they American citizens felt uncomfortable in a place they had learned to call home, and were ostracized by their fellow youth even picked on and threatened. Students spoke of how they felt like there was no one to turn to with no help being provided by counselors or the school system. The American public needs to accept this current generation of Muslim youth if true assimilation is to ever occur between the cultures. America is a land of opportunity and to ostracize someone because of their beliefs is foolish. We should accept all those who are willing to become American citizens, and especially those born upon our soil. The negative stereotypes and labeling must stop if we ever hope to create a unified

country. One of our first objectives should be to provide Americans with a positive view of Muslim life in the area that Americans pay the most attention to the media.

The largest contributor that American Muslims feel produces a negative perception and stereotype of Muslim people to the American populous is the media. Many have felt that the words spoken by media outlets like Fox News have just lumped Muslims into an autonomous collective, and are portraying them as somehow less American due to their heritage. In the article “What They Tell the Media: The Construction of Muslim American Identity in Newspaper Articles” by Michelle D. Byng we see Muslim’s take on American media in which many found themselves antagonized. On page 11 an individual interview going by the name of Kahf is quoted saying. “The worst thing to happen to American Muslims was Sept. 11, We we’re just starting to integrate into the mainstream of America. It was a blow, and we have never been the same since.”(Byng, 2005) Many individuals like Abdel Karim in the article stated that his loyalty is to his Muslim community in response to the back-lash. Muslims are forced to side either against their own religious practices or be shunned by the American people and forced to withdraw further into their Islamic beliefs. Politicians like Republican candidate for Congress Dan Fanelli, and his “This is a Terrorist” ad campaign (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umTITWQuXwY>) are examples of individuals perpetuating the extremist stereotype plaguing the American Muslim population. We see no attempt by Fanelli differentiate what constitutes a terrorist instead leading us to believe it is any dark haired brown skinned individual who is Muslim. This is an individual running for office in the American government using ads that do nothing but showcase the negative ideals of the “War on Terror” which only further widens the gap between so called “patriotic” Americans and Muslim Americans. Media heavily influences the views and ideals of the majority of American citizens whether they agree or not. This misinformation can lead to people reaching conclusions on Islam that fail to connect too its peaceful message. Through positive ads and cooperation with the Muslim community I believe we can get rid of this negative social perception.

Social perception like Social Identity takes a look at individuals within a group setting. Muslims currently in America are suffering from Social Identity being expressed by the American populous who have created two obvious in-groups. This discrimination shown by Americans to Muslims is mainly based upon misconceptions of Muslim beliefs and character due primarily to stereotypes in the media. Social perception unlike Social Identity involves itself more with stereotypes which form a huge basis of the perceptions we develop of others. Social Identity analyzes how one group of individuals can antagonize another just because they are from so called opposing sides an “us” vs. “them” set of ideals. Though that ideal and mentality is also prevalent in current American society. Less informed individuals believe just that when comparing Muslims to your “average” American citizen. The notion that there are two opposing sides within America is an idea that seems to stay relevant. People look for someone to place blame upon or to treat differently, but what truly makes them so different from other American citizens. In group favoritism is more relevant within Social Identity than in Social Perception; with social perception favoritism is not always rewarded to those deemed within the in-group due to the factors defining the group not being truly unifying. (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Organizational Identity has fewer things in common with Social Perceptions than Social Identity due to the fact that it acknowledges that the individual takes great pride in their organizations, and are adamant on proving their group’s dominance. In Social perception

individuals are not given an individual form of self worth instead being classified as a group rather than a gathering of allied individuals. Instead through Organizational Identity a third factor of definition which goes beyond the idea of Social Perception gives individuals a sense of their own self worth. There is still a connection and attachment to the group, but validation can be made without it and if there is then maintaining connections within the group become less important. Muslims though all are a part of the religion Islam have their own unique individual personalities and life stories. When you judge them as a whole you ignore another individuals self worth, and deny them the individual validation all people deserve. (Brickson,2005)

### **[Macro-level]**

According to the ARDA (Association of Religious Data Archives) the U.S. is home to 4,745,054 Muslims who make up 1.6% of U.S. followers of religion. Assets associated with Muslims would be their Quran which preaches of peace and tolerance to the followers of Islam, and preaches of the will and word of Muhammad. The mosques which provide a place of peace and understanding for those of the Muslim faith also helps unite and provide for their local communities. Their religious tolerance is another powerful asset of followers of the Muslim faith. They are accepting of all God worshipping religions. Their devout faith is another asset of theirs it provides them with support, and spiritual strength. One of the last assets I want to mention is tradition which is an important aspect of Islamic life including their religious holidays and the act of prayer five times a day.

Deficits that can be associated with this group would be extremist's a problem they have with individuals who use the name of Islam for war and jihad. The Muslim community can be very reclusive at times keeping to itself and many out-groups are left without an understanding of their beliefs or ideals. Tradition is a problem some organizations have specifically with Islamic fundamentalists whose society is steeped in paternalistic ideals, and leave outsiders with the feeling that women have fewer rights than men within the religion. Unity is a problem somewhat within the Muslim community when it comes to considering one's self as American. In the Muedin article college student's state how many youth are moving into a more fundamentalist view feeling distanced from other American youth. One of the most major deficits I believe is the lack of positive media representation of Muslims in America. Mentioned earlier in the paper this problem is one that must be remedied to further remove the bias from the media. It is strange that rarely are we shown positive examples of Muslim communities, nor are we shown examples of popular Muslim figures within the media.

### **[Mezzo-level]**

Nonprofit organizations provide necessary understanding to the outside community of the ongoing plight of a group of individuals that might not be focused on by the government at large. They can offer assistance either through monetary funds, providing jobs and homes, or hold forums outside the community. Organizations like CNN do articles and stories that give information on different in groups such as their presentations "Black in America" and "Muslim in America." The American Muslim community has organizations that focus specifically on their needs locally and nationally. Two groups in particular The Cordoba Initiative (CI) and CAIR (The Council on American-Islamic Relations) will be focused on in this section. These two groups provide protection and political representation for the Muslim community in America,

and The Cordoba Initiative is one of the primary advocates of the community center which will contain a Mosque being built in Lower Manhattan.

### **[Example 1]**

In the CNN article “Muslim in America” we see an in-depth look at people of Muslim belief and how they are perceived by Americans. People traveled the U.S. to different regions and studied and attempted to understand the current American view on Muslims. It was a 6 month process that started Feb. 6, 2009 lead by Akbar Ahmed an Islamic Chairman at Washington University. Other articles on CNN also added input with the stares and condemnation Muslims in America are forced to endure from their fellow Americans. The goal was to achieve a better understanding of American views on Islamic culture, and a few individuals were positively influenced and open to the study. Though not everyone showed a warm and receptive attitude towards the assisting students and Ahmed, they continued to travel documenting their experiences within and outside of the United States. After the experiment was completed I hope they were able to see a more positive idea of Muslim Americans expressed by the public. The students even traveled to Muslim countries to show the fact that not all Americans despised Muslim culture, and sat and observed as Professor Akbar Ahmed spoke to the students of prominent Muslim Universities abroad. Hailey Woldt , one of Ahmed students at Georgetown University who decided to join him on his social experiment, said that “her experience was a pleasant one.” This article provides one of the rare positive examples of Muslims in contemporary America. We see through Ahmed’s journey that not everyone in America has a negative opinion of Muslims, and that if one would just take the time a better understanding can be formed.

### **[Example 2]**

The CAIR organization or (Council on American-Islamic Relations) provides protection of civil rights and religious freedom of Muslims and all other American citizens in need. Established in 1994 in Washington CAIR's mission statement is "to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding". The organization attempts to provide religious and personal equality to all individuals, and has voiced their opinion about the horrors of terrorism. Recently they defended the right of a female Disneyland intern named Noor Abdallah to wear her hijab (Islamic headscarf) while at work where she will be doing her job vacation planning. Disney originally offered to give her a new job outside of view. CAIR became involved after Abdallah and another Muslim woman, who had problems with working for Disney earlier this year, appealed to the organization for help. They were able to create an outcome that benefited both parties, and help Abdallah maintain her job. CAIR helps individuals who feel they are being discriminated against. They believe in preaching the ways of peace and religious tolerance that Islam preaches to its followers. CAIR has over the years attempted to show a positive image of Muslims within America, but there are many individuals who attempt to deride all that CAIR has done. Critics state that they are actually involved with HAMAS and could be a monetary supplier of Terror Cells, but CAIR has made several statements including those on their national website of their dissatisfaction with individuals committing acts of terrorism in the name of Islam. This statement released April 2009 among others voices the organizations opinion on terrorism “We condemn terrorism whenever it happens, wherever it happens, whoever commits it. Period.” Though CAIR attempts to show American politicians and

the people that they are positive actors within America, they still have their detractors who refuse to accept that their mission is one of peace.

### **[Example 3]**

The Cordoba Initiative is a nonprofit organization much like CAIR. Though CI is believed to be far less invasive and has shown no connection to known terrorist organizations and has far less critics. Cordoba's mission states

Solving some of the most intractable conflicts in the world today requires innovative strategies for cross-cultural engagement. Cordoba Initiative tackles this mandate with forethought, expertise and the ability to leverage contacts in influential positions within the Muslim World and the West. Thinking outside the box about international and intercultural conflict resolution also means thinking introspectively about each side's place within its own historical narrative with a view to devising internally oriented solutions.

The CI attempts to alter perceptions that Western cultures have about Muslim lifestyles and the Islamic teachings they follow, and also attempts to show the Muslim world that a positive connection can be formed with the Western world. The Cordoba Initiative at the moment is working on the Park51 project originally known as the Cordoba House which will create a community center in Lower Manhattan two blocks from ground zero. The Park51 project is being met with resistance from politicians and 9/11 support family groups alike, but at the same time receiving support from individuals from those organizations/groups as well. Those against it claim that it is a monument supporting terror, but it seems that its American's once again painting Muslims in a negative image. There is no proof that Cordoba neither supports nor receives funds from terrorist organizations. The building of the mosque has not yet started, but we now see other mosque projects being protested against only fueling this idea of American hate towards Islam. There remains this lack of understanding in the American people who fail to grasp the fact that Muslims as well died in the 9/11 attack. Just because an organization is run by Muslims does not mean they ignore the pain of the attack, especially considering the fact that Park51 has on its plans the inclusion of a September 11 Memorial.

### **[Micro-level]**

When one is involved with individuals of Muslim decent whether it be through work or just social interaction they should remember not be offensive toward their faith nor be judgmental of their attitude or style of dress. Just because someone is of a follower of Islam does not mean they have no understanding of your own faith, because Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance. One should not assume that because someone is Muslim they do not consider themselves an American citizen. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Muslims many who were born on this soil consider themselves apart of the culture, but the problem is that there are people who refuse to believe that to be so. Who through their actions push them away. The third practice one should adhere to when working with Muslims is to learn more about their religious practices and holidays. Knowing when they are available can be useful if doing team exercises. Throughout the readings such as "What They Tell The Media: The Construction of Muslim American Identity in Newspaper Articles" by Byng I get the image that people don't attempt to truly

understand Muslims or their traditions, and so many problems can be avoided by just reading an article or two. Americans should also avoid assumptions when commenting about events of situations involving Muslims in Europe or the Middle East. One must not assume that the values and morals held there apply to all followers of Islam in America. Not every organization or individual follows the ideals of other members of their in-group, and one should always avoid stereotyping someone because they share qualities with another. The current young generation of Muslims in America are finding themselves more distant in their ideas on America than their parents, but negative media does nothing to bridge or show Muslim countries that Americans are as tolerant and understanding as we portray ourselves.

## **Part 2**

### **[Theme-based Research]**

The sociological aspect of Muslim community is the primary focus in this paper. Muslims are stereotyped by the American media which greatly influences the morals and ideals of the American people. In class we spoke of the tipping point theory from the Gladwell reading in which an individual reaches a point when after hearing so much information they feel that they should look for the answers themselves. The media has yet to force a tipping point for most Americans sadly who still carry negative stereotypes of Muslims, but the same can be said for Muslim thoughts on Americans as well. The idea that all followers of Islam are supporters of terrorism and intolerant of the Christian religion is only believed by those who are misinformed, but that is not to say there are not individuals who fall under this thought pattern. The Muslim religion speaks of tolerance and peace from what the articles cited in this paper state, and the acts of isolated organizations do little to represent the caring attitude of Islam. The social norm in current American society when it comes to individuals who are Muslim seems to be assuming they are supporters of terrorism. I have witnessed people I know do this as well especially with the lingering distrust of American Muslims due to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Muslims in America work and take part in American processes such as voting and education just like any other American. Yet an image that seems prominent in modern American media especially within the Fanelli video linked above shows an image of hate and fright. These stereotypes we have given to others have left us unable to differentiate friend from foe, and only help perpetuate this idea of “us” vs. “them.”

### **[Implications for Society]**

Muslims in America are people who at times are isolated, and treated as the other by their fellow Americans. Though not all Americans feel that way nor do all Muslims show distaste for non-Muslims. The organizations that offer them help are ones that offer assistance to individuals who are not even a part of the Muslim community. Media has a heavy influence on thoughts and common ideals. If used negatively it can be hurtful to those it focuses on due to its sway on the American public. The media has offered positive and negative pieces on Muslim life in America, but the negative perceptions seem to outweigh the positive ones. The community is rarely shown doing positive actions on a national scale. Yet if a negative action occurs even if done by a small fraction of individuals the group itself is given the blame. In the reading “Islam in America: Separate but Unequal” by Geneive Abdo on page eight Abdo speaks of the “rejectionist”

movement that is popular among Muslim youth in America. Due to the distance placed between American and Muslim youth due to general misperceptions and the media a conservative movement is taking place. Young Muslims are turning to a more conservative lifestyle to combat “the growing hostility within U.S. society toward Muslims.” (Abdo, 2005 pg. 9) If this trend continues it will only lengthen the time it will take to allow the assimilation of Muslim Americans into society. The children and Muslim youth, those born here and immigrants, are an important part of the future of American society, and only through cooperation and acceptance can we bridge this growing gap.

American society must stop its negative misrepresentation of Muslims within media and society. The American people cannot be forced to learn and understand Islamic culture yet it is within their best interests to attempt to do so. Though Islamic religious practices may be different Muslims Americans are still protected by the same rights like any other American. Religion should make no difference on how one sees another individual. Islam itself as I have mentioned before is one that purposely attempts to preserve peace; so why would people who have started families here attempt any form of transgression. The American people cannot continue to blame its own citizens for an act of hate they could not prevent nor control. Before listening to the word of media alone people should make the attempt to search out information for themselves, and avoid waiting for that tipping point to happen. Instead force yourself to look for neutrality within your sources which can be hard to find in the media. It will offer far more information preventing the spread of misinformation and provide you with most if not all the facts.

### **Part 3**

#### **[Self-Reflection]**

Originally I didn't know much of Muslims or religion outside of Christianity. All I knew was that the women wore a scarf around their face, and that they called their churches mosques. Growing up most of my friends were either Christian or Agnostic, but after moving to Charlotte I made friends with a few of my fellow students who were Muslim. I didn't learn more about the religion till I started talking to them and asking them what it meant to them. What kind of rules it followed and how it differed from Christianity. I never blamed Muslims in general for September 11 because the Muslims I knew seemed just as affected as everyone else. I saw people around me treat my friends differently and it made me angry, but they told me fighting or yelling do nothing to help the situation. This assignment only helped to further strengthen the positive views I have of Islam. I did learn more about the feelings of resent felt by Muslim youth in America who find themselves growing up in a society whose popular opinion rejects them. The idea of that is unsettling because I know individuals of Muslim faith who are some of the most trustworthy and friendly individuals I know.

#### **{Self-Discovery}**

The five questions I would ask a Muslim individual would be How do they feel about the representation of Muslims in the media, What is their advice for someone who wants a better understanding of Islam, How do they feel about the Cordoba House or Park51 the Community

Center being built in Lower Manhattan, Do they think that Muslim Americans are accepted as being a part of American society, and What do they think is the most important thing Islam can teach us. I talked to a friend of mine Victor who is a 20 yr old heterosexual Muslim male about his ideas on the paper, and asked him three of my five questions. The first question I asked him was what he believed was the most important thing Islam can teach us his response was “ I really just feel like Islam can teach us all how to love one another, and just be better human beings. So much of the Sunnah is just treating people right and being a kind and modest, honest, and patient person.”The second question I asked him was: How do you feel about the representation of Muslims in the media to which he replied “Most American media tends to depict us as "terrorists" or "backwards", like I can't remember the last time they've ever said anything good about a Muslim on the news. I really hate the way they depict us they make us seem like the enemy.” The third and final question I asked Victor was: What is your advice is for someone who wants to have a better understanding of Islam. He replied “I'd probably tell them to read the Quran and Hadiths. Realize that "extremism" isn't supported by Islam” I was not surprised by his answers because they share the same idea that is found within most of the articles I have read. I feel that one cannot truly understand someone until you actually take the time to get to know them. He is right media representation of Muslims in a positive light is rare. I find it hard to believe that this emerging community has no positive figure in the political or social spotlight in America. Though Victor's words are not the defining idea of all Muslims in America the individuals I know seem to hold these same ideas true. I wanted to get a better understanding of what it is like to be Muslim in America, but I also wanted to get a better look at how Muslim Americans see America as well. I believed I found the information I was looking for though it was not as positive as I hoped it would be. Hopefully in the near future this negative perception and stereotyping will have ended for the most part. The media is an area that can help with this problem through them a change can take place, and bring about a new positive understanding of Muslim Americans.

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