

Abstract:

Discontent in Arab America: How Arab American Identity is Transversed by the Media

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The attacks of 9/11 accelerated the changes in cultural perceptions experienced by Arab Americans. Arab Americans are an ethnic group with a history long predating the events of September 11, 2001. Their presence in the United States also long predates troubles in the Middle East. Yet recent events have caused the inaccurate conflation of this group with the phenomena of terrorism and Middle Eastern conflict. This Master's Project examines the inaccurate assumptions about Arab Americans -- whose numbers include both Christian and Muslim members -- which are reiterated in culture by television programs and movies. Surveying existing scholarship on Arab-Americans, including the works of Jack Shaheen, Steven Salaita, and Anahid Kulwicki, this thesis examines demographic data which disproves the popular culture assumptions. The goal of this project is to deliver a more accurate portrayal of Arab Americans and to assess the effect of negative public stereotypes about them.

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I. Introduction: Demographics and Implications

Diversity is now a key element in describing and identifying the spirit of the United States. The arrival into the mainstream of the multicultural ideal has made Diversity a byword and a nationally-accepted principle. Diversity is a cornerstone to American living just as hotdogs during the Fourth of July, Christmas music in October, and how each year this is the year that your favorite sports team will win the championship. Diversity makes the United States stand out among the countries of the world but with diversity, problems do arise. One is that there is diversity within diversity, so it is not enough to simply list constituent groups within the American whole.

Arab Americans are a diverse people. Their diversity helps shape this country, but 21st Century events have drastically altered the view of Arab Americans within the United States. The attacks of September 11, 2001 caused many Americans to distrust the Arab world and the Arab American population in the United States.¹ Media images have been a large part of the continuing distrust because of the stereotypes and negative portrayals of Arab Americans. These stereotypes did not begin after September 11th² but have been around since the 1920's. They were spread by the emergence of Hollywood cinema as mass media. Exposure to these stereotypes cause an ethnic identity problem for

¹ The author is wary of the growing problems in the Middle East and around the world concerning the actions of terrorist organizations in Arab countries. This paper is about the image of Arab Americans in the American media and hopes to educate the American population at large about Arab Americans.

² September 11th, 2001 will also be referenced as 9/11

Arab Americans. Media misrepresentation has caused a backlash against Arab Americans and has contributed to a growing identity crisis for Arab Americans. Portrayals of Arabs as terrorists has set an image in American consciousness. While terrorism is linked to the Arab World; the American media and culture must decelerate the rhetoric against Arab Americans and terrorism.

This Master's paper will first discuss what an Arab American is and how the mainstream identifies them and how they identify themselves. Second, this paper will discuss Jack Shaheen and his works, Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11 and Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People. Next, this paper will analyze how other scholars look at Arab Americans in relation to their portrayal through the media. Following that, this paper will look at how these representations of Arab Americans in the media affect Arab Americans in regular society, and worsen the problems that Arab Americans face. Finally the paper concludes with a blended summary of the scholarly and scientific findings throughout the paper and how these can help with identifying problems in the Arab American community and what can be done to solve them.

What is an Arab American? An Arab American is any person whose ancestry is linked to the countries in the Arab World. It consists of 22 countries. While many people refer to this part of the world as the Arab World it is also accurate to use the Arab League as well. The Arab World spreads across North Africa into the Middle East.



Figure 1 Map of Arab League Members

The Arab League was established towards the conclusion of WWII in 1945. Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan are not a part of the Arab League and are not considered Arab countries (Arab League Online, 2016). Many Americans believe that the Middle East and the Arab World are one in the same but they have their differences. An Arab American is anyone whose ancestry hails from any of the countries in the map and lives in the United States today. Generations of Arab Americans have made America home for more than a

³ Joybigude. "Arab League map and surroundings." Map. Dreamstime. Web. 25 April 2016. <<http://thumbs.dreamstime.com/z/arab-league-map-surroundings-28727740.jpg/>>

century now. Some ethnicities that originate in these countries do not like to be associated as Arabs such as the Kurds and Copts. Just as the United States is a very diverse place, the same can be said about the Arab World.

Population growth has been a key factor for discussing, determining and deciding what Arab Americans are. Arab Americans first migrated to the United States in the 1880s and their population has steadily increased. The largest groups of Arab Americans are Lebanese and Syrians, who make up approximately 60% of all Arab Americans. There is also a growing number of Iraqis and make up more than half of recent immigration to the United States Demographically, Arab Americans are more likely to be multi-generational in the United States (80% of Arab Americans), supporting their century-long presence in the United States (Kulczycki, Arun, 2001). According to the Arab American Institute the Arab American population counted by the Census in 2010 is 2 million, but the current estimate is that the number is closer to 3.5 million because questions regarding race and ethnicity on Census surveys have caused some controversy within the Arab American community (Arab American Institute, 2015). This controversy stems from the question of whether or not Arab Americans are ‘white,’ or can even be described coherently in racial terms. It is important to note that the Arab world stretches from Morocco to Iraq.

Moreover, ‘Arab’ is not synonymous with ‘Muslim.’ Arab American identity has been hard to track because there is no box that a person can check that identifies with the Arab American population. “White” or “Other” have been the two primary identifying markers that Arab Americans associate with themselves. The question of how a person accurately describes their race and ethnicity is a concern for some Arab Americans and

should be a concern for the Federal government as well. Petitions to change the Census questions and create new categories that accurately reflect the Arab American population are being discussed in the Federal government but at the time of writing this paper no changes have been made for the 2020 Census. Such changes are often politically controversial because they can affect the recorded numbers of other groups. Arab Americans' legal identity is an evolving subject in the United States, with ongoing conflicts against ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and inflating concerns about Syrian refugees coming into the United States. In other words, conflict in some Arab nations can influence how Americans see their fellow citizens of Arab descent. Census data does show a part of the picture, but with concerns, animosity, and the amount of media coverage that the Arab world receives, accuracy regarding Arab Americans is paramount in the United States today.

Older generations of Arab Americans are more likely to associate with a white identity. This racial group is highly educated, affluent, and – perhaps surprisingly to some new to the subject -- Christianity is the religion for 70% of Arab Americans today. This should not be surprising, insofar as Christianity began in the Middle East and spread throughout the Near East thousands of years ago. Eastern churches, such as the Nestorian and Chaldean, are as ancient as any branch of Christianity. Older Arab Americans are also second or third generation Americans. They are more fully assimilated as American. Because of different Federal laws and court cases, this ethnic group is defined as white by the United States government. Younger Arab American immigrants to the United States in the last twenty years are more likely to marry within their race than generational Arab Americans, which could result from various factors. The recent waves of Arab

immigrants show that religion is different than for previous generations of Arab Americans, with Islam being the main religion of modern immigrants. There are many different dynamic shifts between generational Arab Americans and recent Arab American immigrants that are causing a rift in how this racial group identifies itself.

Census data also helps determine how these groups move and interact with other ethnic groups in the United States. Within the Arab American population there is a higher male-to-female ratio (119:100), which can account for an increasing number of intermarriages. “Over 80% of U.S. -born Arabs had non-Arab spouses, implying a diminishing ethnic identification (Kulczycki, Arun, 2002).” Identity through assimilation begins to show that different cultures are embracing and merging together. Assimilation is important when discussing how different cultures accept and interact with one another. 80% of American-born Arabs having a non-Arab spouse is a large percent, but after 9/11, intermarriage between Arab-Americans and non-Arab spouses dropped by 13% (Mason, Matella, 2014). Marriage and assimilation have been key components for earlier generations of Arab Americans to identify as “white.” Several generations of Arab Americans have in large part, intermarried between other races but this began to drop off after 9/11. This drop-off could have several reasons behind it; but logic suggests that how the media has portrayed Arab Americans in movies, TV shows and the news must be considered as a possible reason.

Arab Americans are equally likely to either accept or embrace a “white” identity in the United States or to not consider themselves to be “white” at all. Legally, in the United States, many Arab Americans are classified as white, but they do not have the same ethnic background as that matching most Americans would perceive as “white” –

that is, of European descent. It is worth noting that the concept of whiteness has never been stable. During the 19th Century, there was debate as to whether Irish, Italians, or Jews qualified as white, for example. Demographic data shows which groups of Arab Americans would be more likely to accept a white identity. Lebanese and Syrian ethnicities have been in the United States since the late 1800s and were responsible for securing a “white” identity for Arab immigrants in the early 1900s (Ajrouch, Amaney 2007). Incidentally, Lebanon and Syria – Levantine nations – have long been diverse places connected to the wider world through maritime trade. Data shows that older generations of Lebanese and Syrians had a greater chance to identify themselves as white, while younger generations and people whose original countries were Iraq, Palestine, and Yemen had a greater likelihood to identify as other or nonwhite (Ajrouch, Amaney 2007). Different ethnic identifies do not exist for Arab Americans, documents do not have an option to select Arab American, Muslim American, Persian, or Kurdish. These ethnic groups either select white or other. It is worth wondering whether different conceptions of whiteness in the 19th Century and today contribute to this shift. If the major color line in history was seen as white/black, then selecting white would have been a plus factor in many ways. But if today we accept a non-binary multiple identity palette, then the need to pick one of two is no longer operative.

Younger generations and recent emigrants who have recently emigrated from countries such as Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, and Afghanistan are more likely to not consider themselves white or Arab Americans. Technically, these nations are Asian, but the fact that ‘Asian-American’ does not customarily include them shows the limits of American terminology. A similar case would be Egyptians, Moroccan, or Tunisians, all of whom

hail from Africa, but who are unlikely to fit the description ‘African-American.’ These younger generations and new wave of immigrants from the Middle East are predominantly Muslim. Older generations were predominantly Christians, who fled their homelands to escape from persecution, sometimes dating back to the Ottoman Empire era. While a Muslim can be considered an Arab as well, if they hail from an Arab nation, the term Arab American is used mostly to define those of Christian background and those that have had generations within the United States. Muslim immigration has been on the rise since the 1960’s, while Arab immigration has roughly stayed the same. These ethnic groups consider themselves to be different, but most Americans and media outlets use the words Arabs and Muslims interchangeably. This gets close to the heart of the problem. Indonesia is the most populous Muslim nation in the world, and has no Arab identity whatsoever, for example. So to conflate ‘Muslim’ and ‘Arab’ is likely to result in erroneous conceptions.

Census data shows that past immigration patterns reveal that older generations are more likely to identify as Arab American, Christian, and white; while present immigrants are more likely to identify as Muslim American, Islam, and other. Arabs and Muslims are lumped together in the same category as either white or other. Without different categories to separate the two groups the stereotypes depicted by the media for Muslim Americans and Arab American are one in the same.

Many strides have been made over the last few years regarding demographic data and how ethnic groups from the Arab worlds are categorized. The FBI in 2015 began to identify and differentiate between Arab ethnicities and Muslims. The Arab American Institute has also called for different Census categories for the next Census in 2020. The

option of MENA (Middle Eastern or North African) could be a possibility and a closer step towards counting the Arab population accurately (Arab American Institute, 2015). While it is not the best systems since the Middle East is not the same as the Arab World, it is a start. These suggestions are being looked at and could be in effect in the coming years. Although changes are being made and the media as well tries to watch its verbiage, the association between Arab Americans and terrorism is still alive and active. When terrorist attacks by ISIS or ISIL make its way into the headlines a media crusade erupts against Arab Americans. Even the Syrian Civil War which has displaced approximately 30-40 million human beings is a hot political issue with over half of the governors in the United States saying they will not allow Syrian refugees into their state (International Wire, 2015).

Terrorism that struck Americans on 9/11 was devastating. Safety and security that Americans felt were shattered and since then Americans are still picking up the pieces. The terrorist came from countries in the Arab World mainly Saudi Arabia. This paper does not argue that terrorism is wrongly attached to Arabs because it has never happened. Terrorism is associated with the Arab World because they are connected. But it is wrong for American media and public officials to continue to condemn Arab Americans and treat them as if they are all sleeper cells waiting to be activated. The American media and the American public have the wrong perception of the Middle East and Arab countries in a whole. This paper hopes to discuss what is an Arab American, how the media has portrayed them, what scholars and studies have shown about Arab Americans, and educate the American public about Arab Americans.

Chapter 1: Jack Shaheen Addresses Negative Stereotypes

Jack Shaheen's books Guilty: Hollywood's verdict on Arabs after 9/11 and Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People, contain prudent information that will be used here to show how the media, mainly Hollywood, has stereotyped Arab Americans from the beginning of cinema. Throughout Jack Shaheen's book Guilty, he looks at different movies and TV shows after 9/11 and sees how Arabs are represented. The representations are normally negative or associated with terrorism. These representations create a stock caricature that becomes real to the viewing public. If shows like *Law and Order*, *24*, *The Practice*, *CSI*, and *NCIS*, all top-rated shows each year, portray Arabs with these fictional caricatures, millions of Americans will begin to associate Arabs and these stereotypes. As Shaheen puts it, "TV dramas on all major networks-from CBS to Fox to NBC to Showtime-have projected Arab Americans and Muslim Americans as anti-American villains who relish in blowing up people and buildings, killing their fellow Americans (Shaheen, 2008)." The statement by Shaheen is absolutely correct; all major networks have shown broadcasts that have depicted Arab Americans as terrorists. The media perpetuates these stereotypes and makes millions of dollars off such shows. The repetition of the stereotype serves to reify the false image. Average Americans that do not interact with Arabs on a daily basis (they make up only 1% of the population and mostly live in urban settings like New York City, Los Angeles. The largest population of Arab Americans in the country is in Dearborn,, Michigan) can believe the stereotypes. In the news you hear about ISIS every day and watch TV shows on Fox, NBC, or CBS that depict Arabs as terrorists. The deck is stacked against Arab Americans. It is easy for Hollywood and Television networks to vilify Arab Americans because these stereotypes

and caricatures are believed to be accurate. Of course, the very issue of terrorism committed in the name of Islam, by Arab assailants, is difficult to discuss. President Barack Obama is reluctant to use the phrase many prefer, “Islamist terror,” because he wishes to avoid propounding the idea that terrorism is a specifically Islamic phenomenon. The caution is laudable since there are so many Muslims in the world, and since so few are terrorists. But on the other hand, terrorism is clearly newsworthy, and the proclamations of the few groups who do stage attacks often stress their religious impulses. So news gatherers have a challenge.

Jack Shaheen’s other book, Reel Bad Arabs is a large volume of movie analysis, with films listed in alphabetical order. In this book, he writes about the stereotype of Arabs in each movie. The book has been updated twice. This Master’s paper relies on the 2009 updated edition. He reviews over 1,000 movies, with about 125 being post 9/11 (Shaheen, 2009). One of the movies that makes it into his book is Back to the Future (1985), starring Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd. In the opening credits, a television anchorman reports that a Libyan terrorist group has stolen some plutonium. At the time, Libya was ruled by dictator Muammar Gadaffi, who did support terror attacks against American targets, such as the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103. Gadaffi was all most Americans knew about Libya, and he became a well-known foreign villain. But of course one dictator should not determine the identity of an entire nation. As for the film, plutonium is a very radioactive element used in the making of nuclear weapons. I would venture to guess that most people who watched this film knew that plutonium was a chemical, element or something scientific used to make bombs. Marty McFly, the main protagonist of the story, meets Dr. Emmett Brown at the Twin Pines Mall parking lot to

help document the doctor's time travel experiment. Dr. Brown brags and chuckles that "A group of Libyan nationalists wanted me to build them a bomb, so I took their plutonium and in return gave them a shoddy bomb casing full of used pinball machine parts." Jack Shaheen continues to describe the scene as a three minute shoot-'em-up, as the Libyan national find Dr. Brown. Dr. Brown exclaims "Oh my God, they found me". Throughout the scene they fire from AK-47's and even fire a shot from a rocket launcher. The Libyans kill Dr. Brown and begin to fire at Marty, who yells "Noooooooooooo, bastards" and jumps into the time-traveling DeLorean. One of the Libyans is even dressed in a red and white kuffiyeh (Shaheen, 2009), to play up his Arab identity. This scene is fundamental to the movie, because Marty wants to tell Doc what will happen to him in the future but the Doc refuses to know because it will disturb the space-time continuum. Back to the Future was the biggest box office hit in 1985, seen by more than 53 million people that year, it grossed over 200 million dollars (Shaheen, 2009). Last year was the 25th year anniversary of Back to the Future Part 2 which shows Dr. Brown, Marty, and his girlfriend Jennifer going to the year 2015 and arriving on Oct. 21. The week was celebrated by many as Back to the Future Day, because at the time the movie claimed that the Chicago Cubs would win the World Series and that was still a possibility at the time. It even drew itself into the late show world by being a part of Jimmy Kimmel Live. The clip can be found on Youtube.com and shows Doc (Christopher Lloyd) and Marty (Michael J. Fox) making it to Oct. 21, 2015 and how the world is different than in 1985.

The popularity of the movie continues 30 years after its release and younger generations continue to watch what is considered a classic 1980's movie. Unfortunately,

the stereotypes of Libyan terrorists continues with the success of the film franchise, never mind that Gadaffi wound up killed by his own people during a civil war. Jack Shaheen's books are pivotal to the context of Arab Americans being misrepresented in the media. The popularity of shows and movies that are shown helps to encourage and prolong these caricatures.

Movies and the media have a fairly simple formula in that they use notions that are believed in society (whether they are true or false) and create a piece of entertainment for the viewers. While it is easy to say that terrorists come from Arab countries in the 1980s and they still do today as well. It is hard to accuse and believe that all Arab Americans are terrorists. The media still makes movies about Nazis and Germany portraying them as the bad guys. It is easy to do this because the American people knew that they were the bad guys through the use of media in the 1930s and 1940s. Of course when a person sees someone giving a hail Hitler salute or a huge banner with a swastika on it they know that person is a Nazi and therefore a bad guy. The Nazis also committed one of the worse tragedies in our time, the Holocaust. Even though after WWII; the Nuremberg trials, only a handful of Nazis were convicted, most were dismissed of all charges.

It is easy for the American people to associate Nazis with evil. But Nazis were in Germany they were not in the United States and (while there were witch hunting's for them) the American public does not associate Nazism within the borders of the United States during WWII. The American public does associate terrorism within the borders of the United States and that connection leads to an association with Arab Americans. WWII was easy to make a distinction between the good and bad guys and the reason for

war. The War on Terrorism has been a fiasco and has frustrated many Americans with its length and what seems like an inability to win the War. The connection of Arab Americans should not and cannot be associated with Nazis in Germany, they can be associated with Japanese Americans during WWII. Japanese Americans were rounded up and put into internment camps by executive order by FDR. Thousands of Japanese Americans were wrongly committed of being traitors just because of their ethnicity.

The same can be said about Arab Americans while they have not been imprisoned in camps, they have been deported and refused rights based on their ethnicity. Presidential candidates have even suggested in 2016 after the attacks in France and Brussels that Arab American communities in the United States should be racially profiled by law enforcement. When the next possible leader of the “free world” suggests racially profiling groups there is a strong disconnect between the truth and a media crusade. Supreme Court cases such as Korematsu vs. U.S. would fight on the grounds that they were being punished and denied citizenship based on their ancestry. Germans and Italians were not rounded up the way Japanese Americans were, because of their whiteness. Americans drew a distinct difference between German Americans and Nazi Germans. Many German Americans and Italian Americans fought on the allied side and sacrificed their life to protect and preserve America as did Japanese Americans. While Arab Americans claim whiteness they are not seen as white in American culture. Despite the fact that Japanese Americans were citizens and were forced to leave their homes, many Americans see this as a travesty now because they were Americans. This was over 70 years ago, is it going to be 2080 before we realize that the actions of today were the same as those during WWII that Arab Americans are Americans.

Arab Americans problems can be related to those of Japanese Americans decades earlier. Identifying and solving the problems that Arab American face in the media is an important undertaking for American culture. By examining the way that Arab Americans have been captured in the media and focusing on the stereotypes and myths that Jack Shaheen references. The American people will get a better understanding of this ethnic group and the misrepresentation that Arab Americans are plagued with in the media. Turning our attention towards what other scholars have to say about Arab Americans.

Chapter 2: Other Scholars input on Arab American identity

Arab Americans have been called the invisible ethnic group by other scholars (Salaita, 2005). This invisible group is a very small part of the population, roughly three million out of 330 million Americans (~1%), and not a lot of scholarship has been written about Arab Americans unless it pertains to the Middle East and events that took place in recent history. After 9/11, Arab Americans were thrust into the national spotlight and could no longer hide in obscurity. The fact that the airline hijackers were Saudi Arabian nationals led to a lazy conflation of innocent Arabs and Arab Americans as likely terrorists. The media followed any story that dealt with Arab Americans and portrayed them in whatever way they saw fit (normally negative). Steven Salaita argues that many of the stereotypes and depictions of Arab Americans after 9/11 existed before 9/11. The shady or suspicious Arab characters were seen as religious fanatics; inherently deceitful, and having a vast amount of resources at their disposal. The latter point blends the stereotyping of terrorism with earlier associations of Arab sheikhs and OPEC. These problematic views of Arab Americans were in the American mindset and consciousness before 9/11 but afterwards those views became reinforced at the national level (Salaita, 2005). Salaita looks at how the media was a driving force behind the many stereotypes of Arab Americans.

The media has progressed to correct itself regarding Arab Americans and Muslims. President Bush referred to Islam as the religion of peace and was a phrase that he used often in his rhetoric. CNN, FOX, and MSNBC often talk about how Arab Americans should be seen as and have guest interviews with influential members of Arab American organizations. These interviews often speculate that the media is a problem

because of the verbiage that is used to talk about Arabs, Muslims, and terrorists. While they discuss changes that need to be corrected to have a positive influence on Arab communities the actions never follow. Media outlets discuss the unfair treatment of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans in the culture, and while the Medias verbiage might not be as harmful as it was after 9/11 it is still an issue that is damaging Arab Americans. As mentioned before President Obama does not use the phrase radical Islamic terrorism because he does not want to create a divide for Arabs that are Muslim, and Muslim Americans. Regardless of the side a person is on, the truth is that Arab Americans are being mistreated and misrepresented in the media. Most Arab Americans are just as American as their neighbor Dick and Jane. To conflate that Arab Americans are a threat to national security because they are possible terrorist is a horrid statement, and this rhetoric must stop. The damage that is being done to the Arab American community is appalling and will be discussed later in this paper.

Another scholar who agrees that Arab Americans were invisible citizens is Amy Elouafi. She wrote a book review of From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects by Amaney and Naber (Elouafi, 2009). In the book review she writes about how Arab Americans receive a large proportion of the news coverage after 9/11 and yet were never the focus of news before 9/11. Throughout the text identity and whiteness are mentioned as well. Those of Middle Eastern or North African descent are seen as white by the United States government but the privileges of being white within the culture are not present today for Arab Americans. Because Arab American identity is continuing to change after 9/11, it is easy to foster stereotypes of an ethnic group without an identity.

The portrayal of Arab Americans in the media has been highly negative and continues to misrepresent Arab Americans and further hurt their white identity. Major networks such as ABC, NBC, and CBS still show Arab Americans and Muslim Americans as terrorists. Arab Americans are often associated with terrorism either directly by being one or indirectly by having information about a terrorist plot in the episode. Evelyn Alsultany's supports the argument that within these shows, Arab and Muslim Americans are primarily associated with terrorism. "Representations of Arab and Muslim identities in contexts that have nothing to do with terrorism remain strikingly unusual in American commercial media (Alsultany, 2013)." Agreeing with this statement is the article by Mita Banerjee. In the movie *True Lies*, Banerjee argues that while American culture is fascinated with the Arab world, it is highly stereotypical. This comes close to the Orientalism argument made years ago by scholar Edward Said. Said's central point was that even purportedly sympathetic western treatment of Arab history and culture often depended upon an exotic and inaccurate understanding which made the subjects come across as 'The Other.' This idea has become a major plank in postcolonial studies, the academic area into which many of the sources cited here fit. Back to *True Lies*, however. In the film, an Arab religious fundamentalist is smuggling ancient Egyptian statues with weapons inside them to wealthy Americans (Banerjee, 2008). This blatant use of casting Arab men as a religious extremists determined to cause a catastrophe in some part of the world is further evidence of the media's misrepresentation of Arabs.

Within these episodes writers include a "positive" Arab or Muslim character (Alsultany, 2013). This is probably meant to insulate the show against racism charges.

The positive Arab is normally very patriotic and gives information about a terrorist group or is the victim of a hate crime. While the negative stereotype of Arab Americans as terrorist is included in the episode, these shows also include a positive Arab that is not a terrorist but is in fact trying to help save the day. The relationship that is being forged in American T.V. dramas is that an Arab character is associated with terrorism in either a positive or negative way (Alsultany, 2013). By doing this, Arab Americans identities are becoming infused with terrorism, for or against. The problem is that the vast majority of Arabs and Arab Americans have nothing whatsoever to do with terrorism. Alsultany's research exposes that even when the "positive" Arab is on the good side, the stereotype of Arabs being involved with terrorism is being planted into the minds of the American people. Further evidence that suggests Arab Americans are being discriminated by the media and represented with incorrect caricatures about their character and loyalties to America.

In Janet Langlois's article, she talks about the email rumor of the "Celebrating Arabs" that were seen cheering when the Twin Towers were hit. This became fodder in the presidential primaries when Republican contender Donald Trump repeated the charge to support his call for a ban on Muslim immigration. Janet Langlois's main focus is the suburb of Detroit, Michigan that has the largest Arab American communities (Langlois, 2005). A rumor spread via e-mail was seen by millions of people stating that several people witnessed Arab Americans throughout the city celebrating 9/11. This was probably an erroneous interpretation of footage of Palestinians in the Middle East celebrating the attacks. But those people were not Americans. Through the use of email, Arab American relations and businesses suffered and negative images spread. The hoax

was harmful. Arab Americans' white identity began to take a nose dive after 9/11; legends and news about celebrating Arabs further created a divide between Arab Americans and white American ideals.

Arab Americans in the media have often been associated with Muslims even before 9/11, but unfortunately these words became interchangeable after 9/11. The quote from Trevino, Kanso, and Nelson captures the idea that the media and the public have incorrectly used Arab and Muslim:

Adding to this misperception, Western (2003) notes that the public makes no distinction between Arabs and Muslims, yet Arabs comprise a mere 12 per cent of Muslims globally. Additionally, there are a few million Arab-Christians, as well as millions of Muslims, who are not Arabs. In fact, the largest Muslim population is in Indonesia (Davis 2002).

Arab Americans have had negative portrayals in the media before 9/11. Hostage takings and car bombings in the from the 1960s through the 1980s, Pan Am Flight 103, and the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, and the attack on the *USS Cole*, were all perpetrated by radicals claiming to act in the name of Islam. The resulted was more Americans portraying Arab Americans as religious radicals, terrorists, assassins, and bombers (Weston, 2003). In Weston's study of images in the media before 9/11, he found some media self-awareness and concern about perpetuating stereotypes. Media outlets began to realize and see the amount of misrepresentation that involved Arab Americans. "With no more Soviets for U.S. heroes to fight on TV, thanks to the Cold War's ending, however, Arabs have become the clay pigeon of choice (Weston, 2003). Arab Americans were trying to resist the negative image that the media had branded them. Different

media outlets began to write stories about the triumph and the bravery that Arab Americans faced in front of adversity.

Weston found that after 9/11, Arab Americans were seen as having dual pain. In the *Hartford Courant*, a headline read "Arab Americans Deal with 'Dual Pain' after Attacks; While Mourning with Other Citizens, Some Feel Targeted for Their Ethnicity (Weston, 2003)." This dual pain was seen in newspapers around the country as many described the backlash and fear of hate that would come their way. A similar situation might have been the situation faced by Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor, when they were unfairly linked to the attacks in the minds of many citizens. Arab Americans are United States citizens and were hurt the same as any Americans did on that Tuesday morning. The dual pain caused confusion in America, since Arab Americans were too often presumed to have some connection to the attackers, which they did not. As Weston states, "Arab Americans have frequently complained that the public at large does not distinguish between Arabs and Muslims despite the fact that a majority of Arab Americans are Christian and only 12 percent of Muslims worldwide are Arabs (Weston, 2003). Different stories used in the article also did not use the correct linguistic terms to describe Arabs or Muslim. Weston says "Some stories scrutinized did ignore the distinction, seemingly using the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" interchangeably (Weston, 2003). The interchangeability of these words has caused many Americans to not recognize a difference and assume that all Arabs are Muslims. The growing misrepresentation in the media particularly after 9/11 has caused a growing divide in the identity that Arab American have. This divide has caused other ethnic groups to no longer see Arab Americans as white and search for a new identity. An example of the

incorrectness of blending the two identities can be seen in the influx of Bosnian Muslim refugees from the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. These Islamic people are 100% European. Their ancestors became Muslim during centuries of Ottoman Turk rule. Bosnians are frequently Muslim, but never Arab, but how many Americans fail to make the distinction?

While it is difficult for Americans to see the differences in Arab ethnicities because of a lack of knowledge or understanding. Americans are also unaware and fail to realize the differences with women of Arab or Muslim background. The media has painted a picture of women wearing hijabs or burkas and subservient to men, this is often not the case in the Arab World.

In the United States women had a difficult gaining equality with men. Women were the last to receive many rights. Intersectionality, the method of examining points where multiple identity lines cross, suggest that we must examine the case of Arab-American women. Arab American women have received increasing attention the past few years. Women from Middle Eastern countries are seen as victims in the United States and a group that must be helped (Elia, 2006), because of the rules in those nations preventing women from taking part in public life. It is not uncommon for women in Muslim and Arab nations to have different standards. But neither is it the rule. There is wide variance regarding the treatment of women. It is true that females may not drive in Saudi Arabia that women must cover themselves or face arrest in Iran, that the Taliban forbade education for girls in Afghanistan. But also, women in Lebanon, or Tunisia, are emancipated. The notion that all Arab-American women are subjected to men's domination is a dangerous one.

Terrorism is seen as an activity that mainly involves men and something that women know no nothing about, except when news accounts of female suicide bombers in the Middle East reach western media. Because of this image it is easier to help out Middle Eastern women than it is men, because of the preconceived notion that a man could be a terrorist but a woman cannot. Also because of the Islamic religion and what Americans see in the media, the image of a women in burqa or hijabs as being restricted and having no freedom is very disturbing to many Americans. Because of American attitudes to help those in needs and to help the weak, it is easy to see why many Americans want to help Arab American women because they are the victims of a cruel male dominated society that praises terrorism but does not care about the women.

In her article, Nada Elia mentions that before 9/11, Arab women were not readily seen in Hollywood or within academic writings but that after 9/11 Arab women are seen as victims and martyrs because of the culture and society that they live in. This also dovetails with contemporary American sensitivities in favor of gender equity. The prospect of women forbidden to dress as they please or appear in public or work outside the home bothers Americans. Nada Elia calls the patronizing sympathy the “privileging” of Arab American women. By that she means that women of Middle Eastern descent have it a lot easier than men do in the United States Women are seen as victims and men are the enemy. Women writers out number male writers, and even within shows, and the media if a women of Middle Eastern descent is talking it is usually about how women need to improve their because the freedom that American women enjoy is the best (Elia, 2006).

A study by Jen'nan Read in 2003 measures the religious and ethnic differences between Christian Arab Americans and Muslim Arab Americans and shows how those findings interact and conflict with stereotypes about the gender roles within Arab and Muslim society. The findings show that Muslim Arab Americans are likely to be newer immigrants and have a Muslim husband but that the gender roles associated with them do not match the stereotypes. Arab and Muslim women do work outside of the home and follow the same patterns of American women. The freedom to go to work, the grocery store, a ball game, and to go to a bar for a beer. Both Christian and Muslim Arab Americans are transgressing the gender roles and are more progressive than most people believe (Read, 2003).

The study shows that both Arab and Muslim American women are transgressing the gender roles that they are stereotyped with. Ethnicity and religion play a role in her life but Arab Americans carry more modern views on gender roles than many mainstream Americans would assume. Muslim Americans are more traditional in their gender roles compared to Arab Americans, but the gender roles do not simply come from their religiosity; in fact, newer immigrants are more traditional but the longer they have been in the United States the more women begin to adopt more modern gender roles. Hence, there are cultural and other reasons for importing their gender attitudes, but these begin to change upon arrival in the host culture and continue changing over time as these immigrants are exposed to American life patterns.

Looking at the scholarly side gives a certain perspective to the plight of Arab Americans. Many scholars have authored books and published articles expressing a problem that they see in the United States. Statistical data and studies that show how the

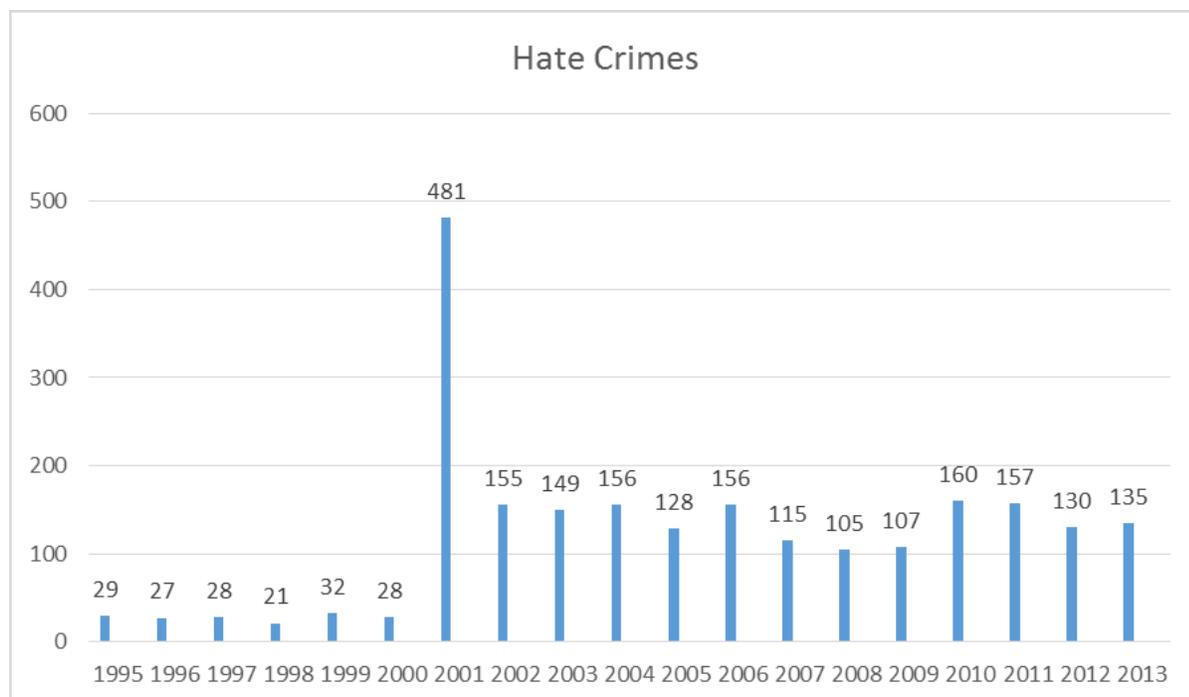
effects of the media and furtherance of stereotypes has harmed Arab Americans reveals several examples of quantitative data.

Chapter 3: Measuring Shifting Identity within the United States

Considering the effects that Arab Americans have been through, looking at the scholarly side of the argument is just one piece of the pie. By gauging and examining studies and data that are about Arab Americans; one can begin to see the interconnectedness of the academic and the statistical world.

The study done by Mason and Matella show that after September 11, Arab began to identify less and less frequently as white. This study also shows that whites were more likely to identify Arab Americans as Arab, Middle Eastern, Islam, or Muslim. Through various generations and immigration patterns Arab Americans “white” identity is being targeted within the ethnic group and from without. Different scholars have claimed that Arab Americans even with their white identity were still on the fringes of whiteness, but after September 11 and the wars to follow that Arab Americans began to lose their “white” identity.

Mason and Matella also used FBI databases to show hate crimes against Arab Americans. Before 9/11 hate crimes against Arab-Americans, defined as hostile actions based upon a victim’s identity, were almost nonexistent, but after 9/11 the FBI states that hate crimes against Arab Americans rose 1700% (Mason, Matella, 2014).



The graph shows the years from 1995 to 2013 and the amount of hate crimes against Arab Americans each year. Before 2001 (1995-2000) the average amount of hate crimes against Arab Americans was 27.5 events each year. After 2001 (2002-2013) the average amount of hate crimes against Arab Americans is 137.73 events each year. That is an increase of 500% post September 11. There are different types of hate crimes, ranging from graffiti to physical violence, so it is not necessarily correct to assume that there was a wave of violence directed against Arab Americans. But the non-violent offenses also contributed to the insecurities felt by this minority group. The average amount of violence in all hate crime cases in the United States is about 60%. That average translates over data sets and shows that 60% of hate crimes against Arab Americans had some degree of physical violence.

In an interview with Abdeen Jabara, who became the president of Arab-America Anti-Discrimination Committee, He discusses hate crimes against the Arab Communities

in 1986. Mr. Jabara wants Arab Americans to be fully protected in the United States and asks that law enforcement agents and the FBI do more to protect these valuable citizens (Jabara and Stork, 1986). Crimes against Arab Americans happened before 9/11 but the increase of almost 2000% indicates that there is a growing disconnect between Arab Americans and other Americans in the United States. This disconnect further shows the divide that is happening in Arab American identities across the United States

Another way to categorize Arab Americans is to look at voting behaviors of racial groups and those elected into office vote toward Arab Americans. Voting behaviors of minorities are important in any public election and how those in power represent their constituents is important. A study by Fine and Aziz focused on if Arab Americans were treated the same following the 9/11 attacks by their representatives. They also looked and compared it too African Americans and Latinos in the country; the two largest minorities in the United States. Because Arab Americans are such a small percent of the population, the findings should show that there was not a significant change in such a small group. The study showed that representation of Arab Americans sharply declined after 9/11. The group used statistical software and looked at voting trends of the Senate alongside the Arab American Institute from 2000 to 2008 (Fine and Aziz, 2012).

“A CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll conducted shortly after the attacks found that 49 percent of Americans favored requiring Arab Americans to carry special identification cards, and 58 percent favored more intensive security checks at airports for people of Arab descent (Verhovek, [2001](#)).” (Fine and Aziz, 2012). This quote is a prime example of the prejudice and notoriety that Arab Americans faced after 9/11.

Turning back to media representations, a group of scholars conducted a study about how the media portrayed Arabs before and after 9/11. The study done by Mohammed and Kaufer in 2009 looked at how Arab Americans in Dearborn saw themselves in their own media sources by using newspapers produced by Arab Americans. Counterproducts are actual tangible material that is produced by a group that is countering the common culture (Mohammed and Kaufer, 2009). By using counterproducts, the authors also use Squires typology to further grasp the media produced by Arab Americans. There are three types of categories in Squires typology. The first is Enclave; this type regards safety and assimilation into the main culture (Mohammed and Kaufer, 2009). The second is Satellites; this type focuses on keeping the dominant and sub cultures separate. Sub cultures let their differences be known, but not abrasively or to such an extent that they cause any sort of panic or intensity (Mohammed and Kaufer, 2009). The third is Resistant; this type resists all forms of the dominant culture and pursue conflict to change the culture (Mohammed and Kaufer, 2009). Looking at the *Arab American News* which is produced in Dearborn, the authors want to determine which typologies were used before and after 9/11 and if any changed occurred. The authors use 113 articles 56 before and 57 after 9/11. An example of an article from an enclave:

“In the days following September 11, Arab Detroit was awash in American flags . . . displayed prominently in the windows of liquor stores and corner groceries . . . gas stations . . . churches . . . and mosques Many non-Arab and non-Muslim observers thought it was all for show—some of it was, of course—but this skeptical attitude only proved how hard it was for Arabs and Muslims to be seen as “authentically” American (Mohammed and Kaufer, 2009).”

Conceptions of terrorism existed before 9/11 and the tragedy of 9/11 cemented this version of Arab Americans into the public consciousness. Arabs living in Detroit tried to show their patriotism and the fact that they felt attacked like other Americans. Sadly, their attempts often failed to convince the mainstream. This article showing that Arabs tried to stay apart of the community and the popular culture is an example of enclave typology.

Examining the articles that are written in the *Arab American News*, most of the articles fell into the enclave and the satellite categorizations. While many articles would condemn some of the rhetoric by Presidents Clinton and Bush, they did not fall into the resistance category, calling for open confrontation (Mohammed and Kaufer, 2009). Examples of Arab American patriotism in the aftermath of 9/11 made it into the news and media but were dwarfed and drowned out by the growing rhetoric of Arabs as terrorists and anti-U.S.

Discrimination in the workforce meets Arab Americans at all levels. Anahid Kulwicki, Rose Khalifa, and Gary Moore's article is about how nurses within a large Arab American community faced an increase in discrimination within their work setting. This article shows that many of these nurses faced similar issues before 9/11 but that afterwards they felt the abuse even more. This study was done in the suburbs and areas surrounding Detroit, Michigan. It should be understood that people in this area are used to seeing and interacting with Arab Americans on a daily basis and being able to see members of this ethnic group in large group settings. 34 Arab Americans nurses were surveyed and asked questions about how they were treated before and after 9/11. Most nurses stated that they felt either no change or a bit more hostility in the workforce.

While none were demoted or fired for being Arab Americans, almost 33% were called negative names by coworkers or patients. Nurses were more aware of intimidation and being seen as suspicious. Almost 50% of all the nurses surveyed did feel a heightened sense of distrust. One nurse restated a few statements that they heard, including an instance in which someone said, “Let’s see what’s under that scarf.” Comments like these are inappropriate and promote discrimination in the workforce and cause to a loss of identity within the Arab American community, specifically the largest Arab American community in the United States.

These issues affect every walk of life, including employment opportunities. One study done by Daniel Widner and Stephen Chicoine found that Arab Americans had to go through almost twice as many resumes and obstacles as their white counterparts. The method of the study was to send out very similar resumes to different jobs and see how these jobs responded to the applications. The only thing that was a major difference with the resumes was the name. The study was set up to send out resumes with white sounding names and resumes with Arab sounding names (Widner and Chicoine, 2011). The white sounding names like John Smith heard back much faster and with a higher frequency than the Arab- (or Muslim-) sounding names like Halim Muhammad. “A man from Iraq working in the Bay Area was fired from his job and specifically told it was because he was Middle Eastern (Kulwicki, Khalifa, and Moore, 2008).” The lack and loss of identity among Arab Americans amidst other ethnic groups further perpetuates the discrimination that is faced in the workforce. We might well be looking at the evolution of a new form of bigotry which did not exist before because of relative lack of numbers and the fact that only in modern times were Arabs associated – wrongly or not – with terrorism. This

should concern all Americans, not just Arab-Americans. In a country that prides itself on the American Dream and equality for all, it is becoming more of an American nightmare for Arab Americans.

A further stressor faced by Arab Americans is mental illness and emotional disorders. Mona Amer and Joseph Hovey conducted a study on anxiety and depression in a post-September 11 sample of Arabs in the United States. They sampled 601 Arab Americans in 35 states across the nation. The study is about the mental health factors associated with Arab Americans in the United States. Literature before 9/11 does show that Arab Americans are at increased risk for depression and anxiety. After 9/11 however; with the rise of discrimination and crimes against Arabs, it is not surprising that this ethnic group is experiencing psychiatric trauma. The test that was done to determine severity is called the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Amer, and Hovey 2011). This test is used to determine anxiety and depression levels in individuals. Out of the 601 samples “One-fourth of participants reported moderate to severe anxiety levels as measured by the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and one-half reported depression scores that met clinical cases as assessed by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D) (Amer and Hovey, 2011).” The amount of individuals that face depression and anxiety within the Arab American community is one of the highest percentages out of all minority ethnic groups, larger than the figure among African Americans and Latinos. The psychological factors that face Arab American are extraordinary and this certainly affects their own identity, when close to 50% of Arab Americans sampled have a case of clinical depression. Arab Americans work, have families and come home to the same broadcast networks as other Americans. The image that is being repeated in thousands of movies

and shows will begin to affect the image one has of oneself as an Arab American. Media representation can be blamed for growing anxiety within the Arab American community.

Depression and Mental Health is on the rise in the United States. More Americans are on anti-depressants now than ever before and a rise in mental health is beginning to sweep the nation. While depression and anxiety are beginning to become a serious issue and concern in the United States, the stigma that is associated still exists. PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) is normally associated with military members and those that survived a natural disaster. Recently PTSD is being associated with personal traumatic experiences in an individual. A study by Kulwicki and Ballout looked at Arab American immigrant women and a link between PTSD. The sample was of 312 Arab American women in the Detroit area. Recent PTSD scholarship has shown that PTSD is more prevalent in woman and children than it is in men. The study concluded that 43.9% were exposed to military combat or war zone, 24.3% suffered from imprisonment, and 20.9% from torture (Kulwicki and Ballout, 2015). While 66% of these events happened 5 years or more, they continue to suffer from the psychological stress of events in their life. “Arab American women have a higher prevalence for PTSD than the overall population in the U.S. (Kulwicki and Ballout, 2015)” Refugees were higher than immigrants for reporting factors associated with PTSD. With the recent media attention of Syrian Refugees into the United States, not just the physical health but the mental health of those individuals need to be prominent as well. Even though these stressors are not caused by the media, the study supports that Arab American woman are more susceptible to trauma than the average American. While the media is not going to change for one ethnic group, it must be understood that Arab Americans vulnerability is a concern for all Americans.

Focusing and analyzing studies that target Arab Americans can give clarity and precision about Arab Americans. The rise in Depression and other Mental Health symptoms, job and work discrimination, hate crimes, and even how Arab American run newspapers and media identifies itself are important factors in talking about Arab Americans. While trying to change public opinion through intellectual work is troublesome; examining studies and data that show concerns at an individual level can be reassuring. Statistical data and analysis have a story to tell about Arab Americans and growing concerns within this ethnic community.

II. Conclusion: Title

In conclusion, through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data, a clear picture begins to form that exposes the media's role in perpetuating negative stereotypes pertaining to Arab Americans. The persistent use of stereotypes and caricatures of Arab Americans are causing an ethnic identity crisis in the modern United States.

Evaluating the works of those that study and interpret the Medias image of Arab Americans is fundamental. These scholars have a read, seen, and listen to the Medias interpretation of Arab Americans for decades. Suggesting that the media is biased towards this ethnic group and shines a mass amount of negative light towards Arab Americans. Just with everything in life there is always two-sides and even the scholars can be caught up and spin their publications in a biased approach. It is important to get as much information, especially when it pertains to an ethnic group and that is where demographic data and scientific studies play a role.

The demographic data gives a short overview of Arab Americans. They are highly educated, have been in the United States for several generations, intermarriage is high but decreasing, and which Arab countries make up the population of Arab Americans. The demographic data is key for analyzing and understanding ethnic groups in the United States. Scientific studies support hypothesis about Arab Americans. The increase in mental health, and job discrimination cannot go unnoticed. Even the identity of Arab Americans in their own published newspapers has gone through changes. By analyzing these scientific studies we get a better understanding of problems and dilemmas that face the Arab American community.

By looking at the work of different scholars and considering their input on the subject of Arab American imagery in the media, we can begin to see that the core of the problem lies within the media. Media is a powerful tool that can alter and establish different views of whatever it shows. After repetitive views of Arabs as terrorist or outsiders, a person may begin to see this false portrayal as the truth. Any event in the news that depicts this “truth” in any fashion is reinforced as the real truth to susceptible viewers. While there are positive depictions of Arabs living an average life, or living lives that are unrelated to terrorism, these neutral or supportive portrayals are overshadowed by the amount of portrayals of Arabs as terrorists or linked to terrorists. Because Arab Americans’ ethnic identity is in question due to international affairs, it is easy for the media to exploit and create easy stereotypes and caricatures. Until the media changes its approach to Arab Americans, the stereotypes and caricatures will continue to exist.

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