Introduction

Islamophobia is increasingly treated as a form of racism in scholarship on its ideological and structural patterns in the West. Scholars argue that a range of markers of Islam, such as clothing, beards, and names, act as signifiers that bring on negative treatment in the same way that phenotype and skin colour do in traditional white supremacist racism (Rana 2011; Selod and Garner 2015; Selod and Embrick 2013; Bayoumi 2015; Cainkar and Selod 2018). Islamophobia similarly works within the same ideological infrastructure as white supremacy, constructing and deploying “us and them” binaries, applying different standards of accountability to each group, endorsing essentialized notions of innate superiority and inferiority, and marshaling degrading representations to make these distinctions appear as common sense. Islamophobia is far from a new phenomenon; rather, it stretches back to the “two 1492s” when Muslims and Jews were expelled from Iberia and Columbus “discovered” the Americas, transporting dominant anti-Muslim views across the Atlantic with him (Shohat 2012). Ideas promoted in the US today, such as that Muslims are barbaric and uncivilized, can be traced to these Old World and New World encounters. Views of Islam and Muslims as threats to Christendom stretch back even further. According to Orientalist scholar Bernard Lewis (1993, p. 13):

For almost a thousand years, from the first Moorish landing in Spain to the second Turkish siege of Vienna, Europe was under constant threat from Islam. In the early centuries it was a double threat – not only of invasion and conquest, but also of conversion and assimilation.

Despite this historical backdrop, it is common for scholars to state, incorrectly, that Islamophobia burst onto the scene in the US after the 9/11 attacks. What these scholars are actually observing is the heightened awareness, whether their own or that of others, brought on by the outbreak of attacks on persons presumed to be Muslim after 9/11.

In fact, only the presence of pre-existing anti-Arab and Islamophobic sentiments explains why US Arabs and Muslims en masse were held responsible for the actions of nineteen brown-bodies persons on 9/11 (Cainkar and Selod 2018; Cainkar 2009). The main 9/11 effect on Islamophobia was to intensify it, unleashing a wave of violence against persons understood to
be Muslim, and to institutionalize it within government policies. Asserting the 9/11 start date for Islamophobia also ignores, for example, the 20th century experiences of Black American Muslims, represented by leaders such as Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X, who challenged white supremacy. The mainstream US press vigorously condemned heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali after his conversion to Islam and reporters refused to call him by his Muslim name, referring to him instead as Cassius Clay, which Ali considered his slave name.1 Similarly, Black Muslim activist Malcolm X lived under intensive FBI surveillance prior to his assassination.

**US Islamophobia rising**

Hate crimes perpetrated against Muslims and persons perceived to be Muslim occurred both before and after 9/11, yet it is important to recognize that the US American socio-political context has changed for Muslims, and worsened, over the past fifteen years. We should not treat “post-9/11” as a singular era because doing so conceals a number of deeper social changes that have occurred. If we look closely at the five or so years that followed the 9/11 attacks, we find an initial period of intensified hate crimes across the nation framed within a much longer period characterized by a wide range of government policies targeting Arab and Muslim men. My post-9/11 policy analysis and qualitative study of Arab Muslim experiences in metropolitan Chicago found that area-wide acts of hate surged and then diminished after about six months, after which they became concentrated in white neighbourhoods with significant Arab Muslim populations, and mainly focused on women in hijab (Cainkar 2009). Policing Muslims exhibited a gendered pattern, in which the government’s focus was on policing Arab and Muslim men as “potential terrorists”, while public harassment, largely perpetrated by white women, was focused on gender-policing Muslim women in hijab. Yet, there is substantial evidence that the activities of an initially small but well-financed domestic Islamophobia movement have proven more harmful to US Muslims than the popular anger of the immediate post-9/11 period (Ali et al. 2011). This movement, the generator of state-level anti-Sharia campaigns, argues that Muslims are engaged in a “civilization jihad” to take over the United States and that Muslims can never be loyal US citizens (Bail 2012). The “post-9/11” narrative is also problematic because it attributes to the actions of Muslims every harm that Muslims have experienced since that time, therein taking on the shape, often unintentionally, of a blame the victim story.

The domestic Islamophobia movement began gaining wide social traction during the 2007–2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama. During the 2008 election cycle, it actively demonized presidential candidate Obama as a closet Muslim and sent the anti-Islam film *Obsession* to voters in swing districts, inserting its dvd in locally prominent newspapers.2 During the 2010 election cycle it mobilized nationwide anti-Sharia campaigns and “Ground Zero mosque” protests, placed *Stop Islamization of America* ads on busses, and endorsed Florida preacher Terry Jones’ threat to burn the Qur'an on camera; all of these activities were given extensive coverage in the mainstream media (Feffer 2012). The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the University of California, Berkeley (2016) reported that between 2008 and 2013, “more than $200m was spent towards promoting fear and hatred of Muslims in the United States”. These efforts to increase Islamophobic sentiments and actions in the United States are what has to have produced increases in anti-Muslim views, not terrorism. A study by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding found spikes in anti-Muslim sentiments in 2008 and 2012, as measured by Pew research public opinion polls, demonstrating their relationship to election campaigns. Dalia Moghahed (2013) concluded that “anti-Muslim sentiment is almost entirely independent of the events of international conflicts, or even terrorist acts on U.S. soil, and much more tightly linked to election cycles and building domestic consent”. Similarly,
a 2012 report in *Mother Jones* documented a “sharp uptick in anti-Islamic sentiment” during the 2010 midterm elections (Feffer 2012). The 2015–2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump leveraged the popularity of Islamophobia and ramped it up to a higher level; candidate Trump repeatedly bashed Muslims, among other subordinate groups, called Syrian refugees “Trojan horses”, and promised to ban Muslims from the US and register those already inside the country (Cainkar 2017). Once elected, President Trump continued to market fear of Muslims as a matter of national self-interest, as evidenced in the language of his executive orders (below).

The negative impact of Trump’s campaign and presidency is demonstrable: the number of anti-Muslim hate groups rose from five in 2010 to thirty-four in 2015, 101 in 2016, and 114 in 2017 according to the hate monitor Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC).³ Hate crimes against all groups increased by seven per cent in 2015, but by sixty-seven per cent for Muslims (Ansari 2016). A Pew Research Center analysis of FBI hate crimes statistics found that physical assaults against US Muslims reached immediate post-9/11 levels in 2015 and exceeded them in 2016 (Kishi 2016). The SPLC also reported thirty anti-Muslim incidents occurring in the five days following Trump’s election. Research conducted by California State University–San Bernardino’s Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism (Levin 2017) demonstrated that anti-Muslim political rhetoric, in particular that of Donald Trump, played a major role in fueling these hate crimes, not the 9/11 attacks.⁴ These changes in the US socio-political climate altered the character of anti-Muslim hate crimes from the first years after 9/11, when women in hijab were the primary targets and white women the main perpetrators (Cainkar 2009, 2018a). Compared to that period, recent hate crime data reveal increases in attacks on Muslim institutions, an increase in male victims, and an increase in attacks on Muslim women by men, including murders. Thirty-five mosques were attacked or threatened across the US in the first three months of 2017, according to the SPLC. Also in 2017, a number of brown-bodied men, mistakenly assumed to be Muslim, were assaulted and murdered (see below). In sum, the Islamophobia movement, its adoption and expansion by the Trump campaign and presidency, and its institutionalization by the Trump Administration, has rendered US American society significantly more dangerous for Muslims than it has been since the days of slavery (see e.g. Diouf 2013). While these changes have little to do with the 9/11 attacks, Muslim haters often cite the attacks to justify their hostile behaviour.

**Islamophobia gains traction through ideological tactics: epistemologies, binaries, essentialization and conflation**

Prior to providing an inventory of recent hate crimes and executive orders, which form some of the structural components of anti-Muslim racism in the US, it is important to understand why, on the ideological level, Islamophobic ideas are capable of gaining so much traction in the US. Anti-Muslim sentiments are not only part of American history, they are also embedded in modern day epistemologies and normative discourses that allow them to seem like common sense. At their foundation, these epistemologies and discourses are built on the construction of a superior “us”, and an inferior outcast world of “them”, a framing that historically underpinned colonialism and white supremacy and that was also integral to gaining popular support in the US for Japanese internment. The US educational system, its textbooks, and curricula, generate these epistemologies of superiority by teaching US children, starting in elementary school, that US history and culture is (1) uniquely of Western origin, and (2) superior to the histories and cultures of non-Western others. These ideas are taught in history, literature, and the sciences. They are communicated via western civilization curricula that begin with ancient Greece and the Roman Empire and then omit more the than 1000 years of intervening human history.
between those times and the European Enlightenment. The very long period between the 5th and 15th centuries is taught as the Dark Ages, a time of deterioration when no human progress occurred. In doing so, these curricula bypass all of the major medical, mathematical, scientific, literary, astronomical, and engineering inventions passed on to western civilization from scholars working in Muslim majority places. These advances in human knowledge, which could only be produced within cultures that valued reason and humanistic exploration, as well as the translation and preservation of earlier knowledge, are what made the European Enlightenment possible. While we are all actually intertwined in human history, our global interconnectedness is erased, by intent, from the history of Western civilization, therein promoting the notion of Christian religious superiority and white European cultural superiority. Europe’s distinctive scientific development and deployment of human racial hierarchies is similarly downplayed for these reasons.

Islamophobia also gains traction due to the ways in which Muslim majority countries are portrayed in the US American media, utilizing a non-complex good country/bad country binary. The Muslim majority world, and the ancestral homelands of most Arab and Muslim Americans, is comprised of more than 80 countries that vary widely on languages, cultures, and levels of economic development. Yet these places are usually characterized in the US media as monolithically all the same, and as violent and uncivilized places characterized by teeming mobs full of hatred. After extensive study, literary scholar Edward Said (1981, p. xv) said about these media representations:

In no really significant way is there a direct correspondence between the “Islam” in common Western usage and the enormously varied life that goes on within the world of Islam, with its more than 1 billion people, its millions of square miles of territory principally in Africa and Asia, its dozens of societies, states, histories, geographies, and cultures.

And yet, in a country that claims to value knowledge, Said (1997) found upon updating his book seventeen years later that despite all of the events that had occurred in the intervening period, American news coverage of the Muslim majority world had become even less complex and more simplistic.5

The good country/bad country binary and the emotions produced by its representations promote dehumanization and prevent us from standing in the shoes of the other (Alsultaney 2012). It absolves “us” of feeling “their” fear when they are subjected to bombs and drones, and from feeling sorrow or even anger when their men, women, and children die. It’s a distortion of reality that encourages public support for the US government doing anything anywhere under the pretext that all are the same, allowing one Muslim majority country to be substituted for another. The good country/bad country binary enabled mass public support for the US invasion of Iraq as punishment for the 9/11 attacks, even though Iraq and Iraqis had nothing to do with them, and produced little remorse for the loss of tens of thousands of innocent lives that ensued. As it always casts “them” as malevolent and “us” as the innocent victims of their evil, we are never compelled to think of Muslims as fully human: as families, children, people who work, love, and feel sorrow, the substance of everyday human life across the world.

These negative representations not only provide bedrock for Islamophobia, they deeply affect young Arab and Muslim Americans. In a 2011 study I conducted of transnational Arab and Muslim American youth, I found that the overwhelming majority of the ninety-three youth I interviewed had highly negative perceptions of their parents’ homelands before visiting them. I interviewed them when they were living in Jordan, Palestine, or Yemen and I asked how what they found differed from what they had expected. Nearly all of them said they had expected
to find ignorant, backwards people, living in tents, and streets teeming with terrorists. For example, Nadim, who was born in Jerusalem and spent only 5 years in the US, told me:

In those five years that I lived over there, I forgot everything about here. So when coming back I thought I’d come back to a desert. From what I heard, like suicide bombers everywhere, and war going on everywhere, that’s pretty much what I imagined. But when I came back I saw it was peaceful and it was a lot better and people weren’t so . . . well I thought they were gonna be ignorant, and it turned out pretty good.

Findings like this reveal that misinformation tactics not only forge civic compliance with government actions and contribute to Islamophobia, they also perpetrate subjective violence on young children.

Essentialization is another discursive tactic that, like the good country/bad country binary, replaces complex variation with vast overgeneralization. Essentialization prepares us to consume ideas such as “Muslims hate us” or “Muslims hate our freedom” without question. Donald Trump was essentializing when he said on 7 December 2015, “There is a great hatred towards Americans by large segments of the Muslim Population” and on 9 March 2016, “I think Islam hates us . . . There’s a tremendous hatred. We have to get to the bottom of it. There is an unbelievable hatred of us” (Cainkar 2017). Essentializing erases history and human complexity and replaces these with notions of an innate human character or an imagined unvarying culture. When a fundamental essence is the genesis of all events, there can be no externally produced cause and effect. Although this line of thinking negates scientific knowledge and rational thought – which the West claims are the foundation of its superiority – it is nonetheless endemic to US American culture. In its reliance on biological or cultural determinism, essentialization is a cornerstone of racism. Essentialization purports that African Americans are predominantly concentrated in impoverished ghettos because of their own culture and innate characteristics, rendering the facts of forced migration, centuries of slavery, the racial caste system of Jim Crow, mass incarceration, and ongoing systematic discrimination as irrelevant to African American life. Essentialization is evident in Donald Trump’s 2017 statement that the US does not need immigrants from “shithole countries”, inferring that inferior cultures are responsible for current conditions, not global capitalism nor legacies of colonialism and imperialism.

In the case of Islamophobia, essentializing proposes that over the course of more than 1400 years of history, nothing has really changed in the Muslim world. As anthropologist Mamdani (2002, p. 767) observes, “When I read of Islam in the paper today . . . [T]heir culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates. It seems just to have petrified into a lifeless custom.” Under such alleged conditions, books written 1600 years ago or 200 years ago can be used to explain human behaviour today. And so it was considered perfectly legitimate by US military trainers to use the 1963 book, The Arab Mind, which cites findings from an 1820 study in rural Egypt to explain modern Arabs, in the training US soldiers heading to Iraq in 2003. Similarly, quotes from the Qur’an are used to explain Muslim behaviour today, while the facts of military invasions, wars, occupation, settler colonialism, mass killings, drones, and torture are considered absolutely irrelevant. Mamdani (2002, p. 767) notes, “terrorism is a modern construction. Even when it tries to harness one or another aspect of tradition and culture, it puts this at the service of a modern project.” Thus, claims that ISIS was born of the Qur’an and represents the inherent traits of all Muslims, in which case all Muslims can be called ISIS, hide the historic fact that ISIS emerged from the real history of the US devastation of Iraq and the internal destabilization of Syria. Essentializations work in tandem with negative media representations to produce support
for the notion that all Muslims are violent; they provoke hate crimes and the bullying of Muslim American children, as research shows.

Conflation is another strategic tactic that merges identities, situations, or places sharing a few characteristics into a single conceptual construction, intentionally obscuring any differences between them. Conflation was used to garner public support for a shutdown of the Syrian refugee programme in the US, as when 31 governors banned Syrian refugees from their states, and as evidenced by President Trump’s Executive Order “Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Entry into the United States”. Conflation was used in two ways to sell the Syrian refugee ban: (1) by conflating Syrian refugees with European born followers of ISIS, and (2) by conflating asylees with refugees.

When large numbers of Syrians arrived in Europe in 2015, escaping the fear and hopelessness of their conditions, they were discursively transformed into a “problem” for the West. Instead of innocent civilians escaping war, choosing life, and seeking freedom, they were (once again) portrayed as threatening people who don’t share our values. The monolithic and essentializing character of Islamophobia played out in November 2015 when, in the midst of this mass movement of asylees, deadly bombings were perpetrated in Paris by persons presumed to have coordinated with ISIS, but who were not Syrian refugees. Syrian refugees were openly called terrorists, potential terrorists, and harborers and supporters of terrorists in sectors of the US press and were immediately, and falsely, blamed for these vicious attacks. In fact, most of the perpetrators were European raised citizens of France and Belgium. While it is true that two of them had snuck in with the masses of Syrian refugees using tampered Syrian passports, they were not Syrians, nor Syrian refugees. These facts were known to the authorities within days, but were considered irrelevant to those in the US who took this as an opportunity to call for banning Syrian refugees. Syrians and Syrian refugees were easily conflated with European born followers of ISIS simply because they both have brown skin and are (mainly) Muslim.

Technically and de facto, the Syrians who fled en masse to Europe were not refugees but asylees seeking permanent resettlement. Asylees apply for permanent resettlement after, not before, entering a country, while for refugees the opposite is the case. As compared to sudden, mass, high risk, and unmonitored flows of asylum seekers, refugee policy works quite differently. In the US refugee programme, refugees must first be interviewed and registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), usually in a country bordering their homeland. Later, those selected for resettlement are interviewed multiple times and vetted. The US vetting process is complex and takes up to two years to complete, involving the US State Department, Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Terrorist Screening Center, and the National Counterterrorism Center, as well as extensive paper applications, in-person interviews, and biometric and medical screening tests. Despite this highly significant and very real difference between Syrian asylees in Europe and Syrian refugees being considered for settlement in the US, and the fact that Syrian refugees, and indeed Syrians, have not been charged with any acts of terrorism, Syrian refugees were summarily lumped into one undifferentiated and threatening group and called “Trojan horses” by then presidential candidate Donald Trump (September 2016). In January 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order halting the US refugee programme under this pretext (see below).

Finally, Islamophobia’s capacity to gain traction in the US derives from the persistent use of double standards. Consider the allegation that Islam is inherently violent; we can test this hypothesis by looking at geographic areas in the US with large concentrations of Muslims. If the hypothesis is true, these areas should show high rates of violence. In fact, however, statistics do not back up this claim. Indeed, quite the opposite is the case: rates of white on Muslim violence are the high ones. We can also examine this assertion historically. We find extensive violence
conducted in the name of spreading Christianity, including mass murder, land confiscation, and removal of indigenous peoples, followed by forced migration and the implementation of slavery to drive the colonial economy. While many people now acknowledge that these atrocities conducted in the name of white Christian progress took place, they do not conclude that Christianity is an inherently violent religion. Rather, they say these reprehensible acts represent a horrible misuse of religion. Herein we find the application of different standards for Christians and for Muslims; in the case of Muslims, the religion is called fundamentally flawed; in the case of Christians, the religion is fundamentally good, but was misused by humans. A comparison of holy books also fails to meet the test; the biblical Old Testament contains plenty of violence and is used by many today to justify violence in the US and abroad. In sum, no religious orientation has a monopoly on violence and there are no data to support the all-encompassing stereotype that Muslims are terrorists or the reductionist view that Islam is an inherently violent religion. Nonetheless, these epistemologies and tactics working synergistically with each other, and are given voice and power by the nation’s leadership, providing fertile ground for the growth of anti-Muslim hatred.

Hate crimes against women in hijab

I noted above that women in hijab were the most common hate crime targets in the years following the 9/11 attacks. I argue elsewhere (Cainkar 2018b), after an examination of the perpetrators and contexts, that these activities should be interpreted not only as Islamophobic, but also as acts of gender policing; they are attacks on violators of hegemonic masculinity/femininity. Unfortunately, information provided in more recent hate crime reporting lacks the rich detail of qualitative research data, including the demographic and social contexts in which these attacks are occurring. Without such information, these acts appear simply as anti-Muslim hate crimes, bearing no relationship to gender; notably, some have not been designated as hate crimes by the police. I itemize below a sample of some of the more recent hate crimes perpetrated against Muslim women reported in the news or documented by the hate monitor Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Typical reporting narratives argue that Muslim women are assaulted because they are more visible than Muslim men, discounting that gender has meaning in these acts, an interpretation I challenge. We know that in US American society bodies are raced and that brown male bodies assumed to be associated with Islam are hypervisible, and we have evidence of this latter fact from a wide range of actions, such as extra security checks at airports, removals from airplanes, and the more recent murders of brown-skinned men presumed to be Muslim. We must leave for further research an understanding of precisely how and why women in hijab are being attacked and especially the gendered social meaning that is attached to them.

In March 2015, Yusor Abu-Salha, 21, her sister, Razan Abu-Salha, 19, both of whom wore hijab, and Deah Barakat, 23, Yusor’s husband, were murdered execution-style in their apartment near the University of North Carolina. Their white male neighbour was charged with the murder, in what police continue to call a “parking dispute” case. There is evidence that the murderer was obsessed with parking. However, hate crimes expert Jack McDevitt says about the case: “With hate crimes, it’s not always an either/or . . . In this case, he’s angry about the way people around him live, but he’s chosen these specific people because they also represent a religion he’s intolerant of” (Talbot 2015). In October of the same year, Asma Jama, a Somali woman wearing hijab, was smashed in the face with a beer mug at a Coon Rapids, Minnesota Applebee’s restaurant by a white woman who told her to speak English. The cut required seventeen facial stitches. Asma, a fluent bilingual speaker, was valorized in some media as “a Muslim woman who forgave her assailant during sentencing”.

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In August 2016, two Muslim-American women in hijab were physically assaulted and harassed in a Chicago neighbourhood. Suzanne Damra reported that a (white) woman followed her and her mother as they walked to their car just after daybreak, spitting at them and shouting anti-Muslim slurs. Captured on cellphone video, the assailant tried to open the car’s locked doors and then broke the car’s side view mirror. The female assailant can be heard shouting at the women sitting terrified in the car: “You’re ISIS bitches”. Damra said it was at least the fifth time she and her mother had been accosted by the same woman (Rogers 2016). They blamed the political climate created by Donald Trump for the attack. The following month, 60-year-old hijab-wearing Nazma Khanam was stabbed to death in Queens, NY, as she was walking home carrying groceries. Yonatan Galvez-Marin (a Colombian immigrant) was arrested four days later and charged with the murder. This attack occurred less than a month after a Queens imam and his assistant were gunned down as they walked home from their mosque.” Also in September, a 36-year-old woman from Scotland in hijab had her blouse set on fire outside a Manhattan Fifth Avenue boutique (Morlin 2016). In addition, two Muslim women pushing their babies in strollers in Brooklyn were punched in the face by a (white) woman attacker who also attempted to pull their hijabs off. The attacker hurled Islamophobic insults such as: “Get the fuck out of America, bastards”. The perpetrator was charged with a misdemeanor hate crime (ibid.).

During the first week after the 2016 presidential election won by Donald Trump, a Muslim woman in hijab was shouted at and spit on while riding on Portland’s red line. A group of teenagers went to her seat, called her a terrorist, told her she can’t wear hijab anymore, and that Donald Trump was going to deport her (Hatewatch 2016). Also after the election, Gwinnett County high school teacher Mairah Teli was left a note written by a child signed “America”, telling her that “her Muslim headscarf ‘isn’t allowed anymore.’ ‘Why don’t you tie it around your neck & hang yourself with it . . .’, Teli said she felt the note was in reaction to Donald Trump’s victory in the presidential race.” In both of these cases the gender and race of the perpetrator is unspecified.

Moving into 2017, in late May, again in Portland, two (white) men were murdered and another seriously injured for coming to the aid of Muslim women in hijab who were being harassed on a Portland train by a white supremacist (Wang 2017). The next week, a video shot in the Chicago suburbs shows a white man at a Mexican restaurant hurling insults and obscenities at a group of teenage women in hijab, with his dining partner sitting idly by. In the video, the man called the girls “mother fucking camel jockeys” and told them, “you can go and beat it. If you don’t like this country, leave.” According to news reports, one of the girls said to the man: “It’s our home too. What do you mean leave?” A follow up meeting with Muslim youth at CAIR-Chicago produced “heartbreaking stories . . . from being yelled at by passing cars, to fear of standing too close to the train platform and getting pushed onto an oncoming train, to harassment by customers at work” (Selvam 2017; CBS Chicago 2017). Later in June, Nabra Hassanen, a 17-year-old Muslim girl in hijab from Northern Virginia was kidnapped and murdered while walking to the mosque. A Salvadoran immigrant was arrested for the crime. Local law enforcement officials called the motive “road rage” (Cauterucci 2017; Suerth 2017).

**Hate crimes expand to include male victims**

The domestic Islamophobia movement and its endorsement by sectors of US leadership have fostered a broader animosity towards Muslims and more violent forms of attack than that which characterized the post-9/11 years. In recent years we have witnessed more male victims, more murders, and increased White supremacist involvement in anti-Muslim activities. In August
2016, Imam Maulama Akonjee and his associate, Tharam Uddin, were shot at close range in the head while walking home after prayers in Queens, NY. Brooklyn resident Omar Morel was convicted of the murders. In Tulsa, mid-August, Khalid Jabara was shot and murdered at point blank range at his home by his neighbour, a (white) man who had been terrorizing Jabara’s Lebanese American family since he moved next door to them in 2011. The killer had been leaving menacing letters on their property as well as threatening voicemails and emails, using language such as, “dirty Arabs”, “Aye-rabs” and “Mooslems.” “ Fuck you Arabs, Fuck you bastards.” “I want to kill you all.” Just a year before he murdered her son, the perpetrator hit Khalid’s mother Haifa Jabara with his car, nearly killing the 65-year-old woman. He had confessed to the crime and was charged with assault and battery with a deadly weapon, among other offenses. Although he was initially jailed pending trial, he was released in May on a $60,000 bond. The Jabara’s were in fact Christian, not Muslim, but the stereotype is so ignorant as it is pervasive, tied to brown skin, and images of Ali Baba on a flying carpet, that Sikh Temples have been attacked and Sikhs murdered under the assumption that because they wore turbans they were Muslim. Later in 2016, police in Garden City, Kansas arrested three white men with a large stockpile of weapons. Calling themselves the “Crusaders”, they had planned to blow up an apartment complex housing Somali Muslims. Police reports said their “cult of violence and hate” planned to create a bloodbath in order to ignite a religious war. Also in October a white man from southern California man was arrested for threatening the Islamic centre of southern California. Police found a large stockpile of weapons in his home.

Closer to the presidential election, in early November 2016, Hussein Saeed Al Nahdi, a Saudi studying in the US, was beaten and murdered near University of Wisconsin-Stout. Police officers found 24-year-old Al Nahdi unconscious and bleeding from his mouth and nose when they arrived on the scene of the crime. A white man from Minnesota was charged with the murder. Also in early November, four 13–15-year-old Syrian refugees were beaten in St Louis, with one seriously injured. They had been in the US, seeking refuge, for only 6 weeks. In December 2016 in Simi Valley, Ca. two white men approached Muslim worshippers leaving a mosque and shouted racial slurs at them. A fight broke out and an “unidentified man” stabbed one of the Muslims, who was taken to hospital with non-life threatening injuries. The attack followed months during which mosques across California had been receiving letters calling Muslims “vile and filthy people” and threatening genocide.

Murders occurring early in 2017 reveal a convergence of nativist and anti-Muslim sentiments, making it difficult to determine if one view was more causal than the other. In February 2017, two Indian men, reportedly mistaken for Iranians (in one account) or “middle easterners” (in another account), were shot in a bar outside of Kansas City, Missouri. The white male assailant yelled, “Get out of my country” before opening fire. Srinivas Kuchibhotla died shortly after the shooting while Alok Madasani recovered from his injuries. On March 2nd, Harsh Patel was murdered outside of his home in Lancaster, South Carolina after returning from closing his store. The following day, Deep Rai, a 39-year-old Sikh man was shot in Kent, Washington while he was working on his car in his driveway. He was told to “go back to [his] country”. While there is no proof of an Islamophobic element in the shootings of these two Indian men, one fatal, the anti-immigrant tone is clear. Nonetheless, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between anti-South Asian racism and Islamophobic racism as South Asians of all religions have been murdered under the assumption that they are Muslims (Cainkar 2018a).

There has also been a post-Trump election increase in attacks on mosques: In January 2017 an arsonist completely destroyed the Islamic Center of Victoria, Texas and another mosque under construction in Texas was burnt to the ground. Also in Texas, Muslim Free America banners were spotted in a range of locations, including university campuses. In February
2017, a white man dressed in fatigues, wearing a backpack, and on roller blades threatened to bomb a mosque in suburban Des Plaines, Illinois. That same month a mosque in suburban Tampa was arsoned. In August, 2017 a Somali-American mosque in Bloomington, Minnesota was bombed (a map of mosque attacks can be found at www.aclu.org/map/nationwide-anti-mosque-activity).

As indicated above, Muslims are not alone in experiencing increasing levels of hate. Hate crimes increased against Latinx, African Americans, Jews, Asian Americans, and the LGBTQ community after Donald Trump’s candidacy and election as president. The SPLC Hatewatch Staff reported in February 2017 that “The number of hate groups in the United States rose for a second year in a row in 2016 as the radical right was energized by the candidacy of Donald Trump.”

Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University at San Bernardino said, “Attacks against Muslims tend to be more violent than those against Jews . . . That is partly because Muslims are ‘more identifiable’ when in religious attire and have a much higher degree of prejudice directed towards them.”

Zainab Arain, coordinator of the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) Department to Monitor and Combat Islamophobia, concluded, “The presidential election campaign and the Trump administration have tapped into a sea of bigotry and hate that has resulted in the targeting of American Muslims and other minority groups.”

Non-violent harassment was the most frequent incident type documented by CAIR in the second quarter of 2017, followed by hate crimes involving physical violence or property damage, and after that, FBI or other government agency “inappropriate targeting”. Arain concluded that “If acts of bias impacting the American Muslim community continue as they have been, 2017 could be one of the worst years ever for such incidents.”

CAIR’s latest report tabulates 195 anti-Muslim hate crimes through the first nine months of 2017, a 20 per cent increase from the same period in 2016. Assaults, threats against mosques, bullying of school children, and Islamophobic statements made by elected officials continued to take place in 2018.

**Trump’s executive orders**

Within a week of his inauguration as President of the United States, Donald Trump issued an executive order that included a “Muslim ban” and a refugee ban, institutionalizing Islamophobia into law. The executive order titled “Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” was signed by Trump on 27 January 2017. It stated: “I hereby proclaim that the entry of nationals of Syria as refugees is detrimental to the interests of the United States and thus suspend any such entry.” Among other things, this order indefinitely suspended admissions of Syrian refugees, suspended all refugee admissions for 120 days, and limited the total flow of refugees into the United States. When reinstated, refugee admissions would be permitted only for nationals of countries for whom members of Trump’s Cabinet deem can be properly vetted. The temporary ban on refugee admissions was ended on 24 October 2017 when Donald Trump signed a new executive order calling for a 90-day review of the programme for 11 countries his administration deemed “high risk”: Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, and North Korea.

The same January executive order stated:

Numerous foreign-born individuals have been convicted or implicated in terrorism-related crimes since 11 September 2001, including foreign nationals who entered the United States after receiving visitor, student, or employment visas, or who entered through the United States refugee resettlement program.
The EO barred all persons from certain “terror-prone” countries from entering the United States for 90 days. The countries included were Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Yemen and Somalia, although Iraq was shortly thereafter removed from the list. Trump argued that, “What we did was, we focused on, instead of religion, danger” (Cainkar 2017). However, data compiled by sociologist Charles Kurzman revealed, “since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, no one has been killed in the United States in a terrorist attack by anyone who emigrated from or whose parents emigrated from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, the seven countries targeted in the order’s 90-day visa ban.” This section of the Executive Order was ruled unconstitutional in two appellate courts because it smacks of “religious animus” and violates the Establishment Clause of the US Constitution, which states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . .” President Trump issued two new versions of the order, both of which were challenged by litigation. The US Supreme Court nonetheless ruled that implementation of the order could proceed while appeals are being heard. The US Supreme Court heard testimony for and against the ban in April 2018 and issued a decision in June upholding the ban.

Conclusion

Rising hate crimes and recent government policies provide strong evidence that Islamophobia has reached new heights in the United States on both ideological and structural levels. Anti-Muslim actions are ideologically supported through claims that American values are superior to those of Muslims, fabricated claims of an inherent global Muslim hatred of Americans, and persistent suggestions that Muslims are morally inferior human beings. This latter claim of innate inferiority, used to oppress and segregate other groups, has a long, long history in the US. In the latter half of the 20th century, such a conceptualization of Arabs and Muslims was widely promoted and deployed in the US to manufacture consent for American imperial policies in the “middle east” (Cainkar 2018a), therein producing racialized understandings that led to massive collective backlash after the 9/11 attacks. The 21st century US Islamophobia movement expanded and domesticated the Muslim threat to include “civilization jihad” and cultural takeover, emulating European anxieties one thousand years back. This movement is now joined by white supremacists allies, and its ideas, embraced by the President of the United States and his Administration, are shaping policy at the top. Consistent with white supremacist ideology, we can expect the pattern of mass killings by whites in the US to be viewed as exceptions to inherent goodness, and any transgressions by Muslims as proof of inherent badness.

Notes

1 For an illustration of media treatment of Muhammad Ali I highly recommend the film The Trials of Muhammad Ali.
2 For example, on a Sunday before the 2008 presidential election, every copy of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel contained a copy of this DVD.
4 Commenting on the role of national leadership in promoting or dissipating hate, hate crimes expert Brian Levin (2017) reports a 45% national decrease in hate crimes after President Bush’s speech on 17 September 2001 “promoting tolerance”, as compared to a doubling in hate crimes after Candidate Trump’s tweet on 7 December 2015 calling for a “Muslim ban.”
5 I have heard more in depth analyses of the complexities of the behaviour of dogs on the US media.
References


Feffer, J. 2012. Islamophobia and the 2010 Election: Though Obama’s Policies on Islam and the Middle East Differ Little from his Republican Challengers, the Right Still Claims He is Pro-Islamic. *Mother Jones*, 29 March.


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