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## Social Bonding Theory and Early 20th Century Islamophobia

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## Abstract

Contemporary discussions of Islamophobia are oftentimes couched within discussions of national security concerns that follow the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Further, the victims of Islamophobia are typically situated within discussions revolving around Muslim-immigrant, or immigrant-descended communities. However, a closer examination of the history of both Islam in America, and national security policy reveal that not only does the presence of Islamophobia pre-date 9/11, it has its roots within, and has worked alongside Jim Crow racism. This project 1) explores the earliest forms of Islamophobia in America as an early 20th century, and distinctly anti-black phenomenon, while simultaneously 2) applying social bonding theory to explain the criminalization of early (black) Muslim groups.

## Introduction

Although the term “Islamophobia” actually appeared for the first time in 1922 in an essay by Etienne Dinet, its’ usage has intensified since 9/11 to the point of relative familiarity (Cesari 2011). At a basic level, Islamophobia is simply the “...dread, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply or attribute negative stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims. These views are generally based on an outlook or worldview involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims which results in practices of exclusion and discrimination (Cesari 2011 and Bleich 2011). What is concerning however is that much of the contemporary discourse surrounding Islamophobia has an overwhelming tendency to posit it as a distinct post-9/11 phenomenon, and an exclusive staple of the experience of immigrant and/or immigrant-descended communities in America. Whether this is byproduct of a lack of knowledge regarding the history of immigration policy in America, or a lack of knowledge regarding the history of Islam in America is unclear. Nevertheless, a closer look at early immigration policy, and the influence of Orientalist thought establish that the ideological underpinnings necessary for anti-Muslim sentiment were established well prior to 9/11.

Orientalism was central in further entrenching existing racist ideas from the aforementioned period. Being largely a byproduct of 16th and 17th century European colonialism, Orientalism too was framed through the lens of Christianity. The accompanying exploitation and blood shed that came with the establishment of empire was both justified and bolstered by an understanding that Christians had providence over the rest of the world, and therefore should dominate. Dubbed savage, animalistic, and heathenistic by Europeans, the victims of these conquests were deemed to be casualties of a necessary evil. In the 18th century, continued colonial conquests were spurred by “scientific” reasons as opposed to religious ones.

Influenced by Enlightenment ideas that classified all people into “races” based on phenotypical difference, Europeans concluded that there was a racial hierarchy in which they inhabited the top position. A key feature of Orientalism is its primacy on philologically inspired ideas that suggest that all that is noteworthy about people can be garnered in their texts and language.

Consequently, the Qur’an became the explanation for all scrutinized traits and behaviors by Muslim groups. It is also here that Muslim became a “race.” Because racialist theory of this period argued that all people of a given race act alike, this resulted in dangerous generalization of Muslims. Namely, a belief that the “Muslim world” was static, and barbaric. These ideas resulted in the continued perpetuation of damaging stereotypes regarding Islam and Muslims: Islam is monolithic, exceptionally sexist, and inherently violent (Kumar, 2012 and Beydoun, 2017 and 2018). It should also be noted that much of America’s knowledge and disdain towards Islam is actually situated within anti-blackness as many of the African slaves brought to the United States through the trans-Atlantic slave trade were Muslims (Diouf, 2013, Beydoun, 2017 and 2018). Even today, American blacks make up roughly 24% of all American Muslims (Beydoun, 2018). All things considered, the racial, political, and ideological landscape for Islamophobia was established well before 9/11. Viewing Islamophobia in any other manner obfuscates a pronounced historical pattern of racial discrimination that has effected a large and diverse number of religious and ethnic minorities in the United States (Love, 2017). However, Islamophobia is assumed to be a primary concern of immigrant Muslims. This too is untrue. What this project aims to do is explore early 20th century Islamophobia. The necessity of this study lies in its exposition of Islamophobia as an age-old social feature of bigotry in the United States that occupies a place at several intersections at once.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that will be of interest for my project is that of social bonding theory. Presented by Travis Hirschi in 1969, social bonding theory argues that most people can be adequately socialized (or bonded into), societies most foundational institutions such as schools, and families. Hirschi suggests that more strongly an individual is bonded to social conventions, the less likely they are to participate in criminal behavior. In other words, the strength and durability of an individual's bonds or commitments to conventional society inhibit social deviance (Hirschi 1969 and Simpson 1976). Therefore, the individual need for belonging and attachment to others is paramount as this influences behavioral, emotional, and cognitive processes. In the commission of various forms of social deviance, including criminal behavior, the connections between individuals and the larger society are weaker than those who do not engage in deviant behaviors (Durkheim 1947).

These bonds are measured by four parameters: 1) attachment, 2) commitment, 3) involvement, and 3) morality (Tibbetts, 2015). When "attachments" are spoken of, this refers to the expressed concern about what others think, or how sensitive the individual is to the opinion of others." If sensitivity levels are high, individuals would be less likely to engage in negative/criminal behaviors for fear of disappointing others. "Commitments" are understood as the investment of time and energy into conventional activities with a conscious awareness that deviant behaviors would jeopardize those investments. "Involvement" speaks to time and energy invested in conventional activities with such a magnitude of commitment that very little time remains for unscrupulous activities. Finally, "beliefs" refers to the degree with which an individual shares the same beliefs and/or "value system" with the dominant group (PYJ, 2017).

In putting this framework into action, Wiatrowski, Griswold, and Roberts (1981) found that large correlations exist between the four bond elements presented in social bonding theory and delinquent behavior. This study however noted that social bonds are created by more than just familial relationships. Particularly, this study noted that schooling, or education plays an important role in the successful inculcation values that facilitate social bonding. Additionally, social class played a role as well in the regard that it has a tendency to influence the effectiveness of the bond creation. What is of central importance for the purposes of this project is the positive correlation with social bonds and delinquency levels.

This is central to the discussion at hand because America prides itself on its multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has its ideological origins in ideas emanating from The Enlightenment period which called for a subordination of religion to more rationalistic discourses that appealed to notions of empiricism. Because Islam typically does not endorse, or even recognize a separation between notions of the sacred and the secular, this context potentially creates an existential crisis for practicing Muslims. Prohibitions on homosexuality, consumption of alcohol, and notions of modesty for women are just a few of the “open air” tensions that are present for Muslims living in secular societies like America. All this is further exacerbated by notions of Islam as being inassimilable with American values. Tensions such as these form barriers to bonding with the larger non-Muslim secular society. Under such conditions, delinquency can be expected on one end, and arguably necessitated for proper religious practice on the other.

What will follow is a section explaining the methodology used to collect that data that will be the focal point of analysis. There will be attention afforded to the rationale for data collection methods, definitions of the study populations, procedures, and study limitations. The

next portion will be the discussion section. Here there will be an outlining of the primary argument being offered, and discussion that includes all the central findings of the study and accompanying analysis.

### Methodology

The purpose of this project is to compare and contrast Islamophobia as it was experienced by Muslims in early 20th century America. More specifically, the primary research question is: What did Islamophobia look like in early 20th century America? This section summarizes the rationale for the methods selected and literature references, definitions of populations of interest, and the limitations of the study.

The method of data collection for this study is largely an exploration of history. An exploration of early 20th century Islamophobia necessitates an historical exploration of the development of Muslim communities during this period. In doing so, there has to be an examination of the social and political context in which these communities developed. Further, there needs to be an examination of related policies, as well as an exploration of both the conceptions of, and treatment of race. All of these parameters of analysis must be included in order to properly designate, examine, and analyze Islamophobia as it existed during this period.

The sources selected were books authored by renowned scholars and experts on the related subjects, and articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Through a perusal of these sources, information was gathered about existing religious landscapes, background of Muslim communities, conceptions of race, immigration patterns and policies, national security policy, general-level as well as personal experiences of Muslims during both periods. The populations used in this study that will represent early 20th century Islamophobia will be the proto-Islamic

groups. Consisting primarily of data related to the Moorish Science Temple (MST) and the Nation of Islam (NOI), these groups were indigenous and black.

### The Early Muslim Scare

#### Moorish Science Temple of America

Beginning in the 1930's, the FBI began their efforts to destroy the MST. It was during this period that the increasing global identity that was being established by the MST was being viewed as a threat to the internal security by the Department of Justice. It should also be noted that the MST's being perceived as a threat of any kind stemmed from the stereotypical East/West dichotomy that began to color American's understanding of Islam during this time. By 1940, the FBI classified all black Muslim groups under "Extremist Muslim Groups and Violence." The root of fear on behalf of the federal government was based on a notion that the MST and other black Muslim groups were part of a worldwide network that was in collusion with Japanese-American networks. Further, these networks would facilitate a union of the "dark races" and take over America. Central to this notion is that because World War I was taking place and soldiers were fighting in foreign lands, America would be more vulnerable to take over (Turner, 1997).

Because of their alleged pro-Japanese stance, black Muslim organizations (as well as others) were investigated for sedition. Specifically the complimenting of the slogan "Africa for Africans" with "Asia for Asians" is what garnered attention of the federal government. Further, the mission of cultivating a "spirit of love for the ancestral homes of the dark peoples," and the establishment of their own governments in there ancestral lands drew the ire of the federal government. However, it should be noted that pro-Japanese sympathies were more common than not among black nationalist organizations in the 1940's (Turner, 1997). Satokata Takahashi was a Japanese national who would eventually become aligned with an organization called "The



Development of Our Own” (or TDOO). Takshaski used the organization to “urge Negroes to join with all other colored people-yellow, brown, and black-against all white people.” These activities, coupled with Takahashi’s being roommates with prominent MST members (Cash C. Bates and Herschel Washington) was believed to have been the alliance that spurred the pro-Japanese sympathies that would become so concerning to the federal government (Allen, 1994, and Turner, 1997).

As these investigations were taking place, the authorities found no substantial evidence of any seditious activities. Despite the lack of evidence, an MST branch located in Holmes County, Mississippi was raided in 1942. Several of the chapters’ prominent members were indicted for teaching that the Japanese were fighting a war to liberate all the Asiatic races-which also included American blacks. Additionally, it was alleged that they were teaching that the Japanese would eventually invade the United States and all “negroes” in good standing would “cooperate” with the Japanese once this takeover took place. The organization likely drew attention to themselves because of their agitation for ending Jim Crow segregation in public facilities. That same year several members associated with the Belzoni (MS) chapter were arrested for refusing to sit in the back of the bus. The FBI report of this incident listed them as risks to “internal security” (Turner, 1997).

As World War II proceeded, the FBI shifted its focus to black Muslim’s Selective Service Violations. In 1942, fifteen members of the Kansas City chapter were arrested for failing to register for The Selective Service. The following year, a prominent figure in the MST named C. Kirkman Bey was arrested for charges that involved “internal-security-custodial detention and sedition.” Provocation of the MST continued into the 1950’s. During this time, The Selective Service actively made it increasingly difficult for members of the MST to attain “conscientious

observer” status (Turner, 1997). The more the federal government investigated and infiltrated the MST, they found that there was variance between different groups and they began to exploit it. For instance, it was discovered that a MST organization was experiencing antagonisms and split into two differing factions. One required the following of the Islamic diet, the wearing of fezzes, and the growing of beards while the other did not require these things. The adherence to more traditional Islamic prescriptions was understood by the federal government as evidence of their involvement as global conspirators against the United States. Investigations into the MST continued into the 1980’s, but by this time, the federal government focused their energy and resources on other Muslim groups.

#### The Nation of Islam

Federal attention came to the NOI around the same time as it came to the MST. The same fears of a “colored alliance” being forged with the Japanese that concerned the FBI about the MST applied to the NOI as well. The NOI too was subject to federal investigation fearing that Satokata Takahasi had influence among the NOI as well. In fact, Elijah Muhammad was sent to federal prison in 1943 after being convicted of failure to register for the draft (Curtis, 2009), and he was one of twenty total religious leaders prosecuted for sedition (Curtis, 2015). However, federal concerns about the NOI took a different form: Based on previous attention afforded to the MST, it drew the DOJ as well as the FBI to reason that the Islam, as it was practiced by the NOI, was not *real* Islam. This conclusion was reached because of their propagation of hatred of whites (2013), as well as their separatist ideology (GhaneaBassiri, 2010). Further, with the help of academics, and media coverage, the FBI concluded that the NOI lacked Islamic authenticity. To them, the real Muslims were those immigrating from the Muslim world. This created a conundrum of sorts because it was fine for Muslim immigrants to practice a foreign religion and

attach it to their ethnicity as long as they assimilated to other mainstream American values. This feat neatly within American ideas of freedom for all. However, it was unacceptable for indigenous black Americans to identify with a foreign religion that was not part of their prior culture. By doing so, they were thought to be denying their identity as Americans and this upset American's standardized racial assumptions. Similar to the MST, the FBI

In 1967, the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (or COINTELPRO) turned its attention to the NOI as its largest target. Aiming to infiltrate and suppress "black nationalist hate groups," federal agents sent anonymous letters to Elijah Muhammad's wife as well as his daughters telling of his illicit sexual relationship with other women in the organization. Federal agents in league with journalists also sent anonymous letters to different nationalist organizations in an attempt to pit the organizations against each other in disinformation campaigns. Particularly, six cities were sites of disinformation campaigns in which the FBI tried to create tension between the NOI and the Black Panthers Party. Federal agents also penned anonymous letters to Elijah Muhammad alleging indignations on behalf of different minister in the NOI, and planted informants to spread false rumors members and leaders. It is also believed that the FBI was instrumental in supporting W.D. Muhammad (Elijah's son) to become the successor of his father. He was believed to be the only one with the "qualifications" to lead the NOI away from their "racist" teachings (Curtis, 2013, GhaneaBassiri, 2010).

#### Social Bonding Theory and the proto-Islamic groups

Hirschi (1969) suggests that the more strongly an individual is bonded to social conventions, the less likely they are to participate in criminal behavior. What we see among the proto-Islamic groups is an abundance of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that place these groups outside of mainstream America during this period. Between these two groups, there is the

rejection of accepted racial nomenclature for blacks during this period, public criticism of American foreign and domestic policy, domestic support for a foreign power, refusal to register for the Selective Service during wartime, and the open condemnation of white supremacy. All of which led to “deviant” behavior at best, and “criminal” behavior at worst for members of these groups. However, context is also key to this discussion. Mired in abject poverty, navigating Jim Crow segregation, an epidemic of lynching, and with the Red Summer in fairly recent memory, many if not most expressions of racial pride, and dignity expressed among American blacks during this period would have placed them in deviancy whether these expressions were housed in theology or not.

In consideration of the aforementioned contextual factors, when applying the measures of social bonding as established by Hirschi (1969), the lack of a substantive bond becomes increasingly clear. In looking at “attachment,” by the time the proto-Islamic groups begin to appear in America, American blacks were “sensitive” to the opinions of whites primarily out of necessity as not garnering the approval of a white person(s) could literally cost a black person their life. Particularly after the failures of Reconstruction, and during the period of The Gilded Age, blacks saw the end of slavery, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (Foner, 2017), the participation of legal institutions in the extra-legal murder of black bodies (Dray, 2003), ethnic cleansings that birthed sundown towns (Jaspin, 2008), and the rise of Jim Crow segregation (Gates, 2020). Under such circumstances, many if not most American blacks were clear that no successful (or unsuccessful) engagement in, or adoption of respectability politics would make their experiences any less “black.” Therefore, any attachment many blacks had to the opinions of whites during this period would more properly be understood as “coerced deference” as opposed to attachment in the vein in that Hirschi (1969) speaks of.

The application of “commitment” is one of the more interesting discussions. It can be argued that American blacks did in fact invest a great deal of time and energy into conventional behaviors and endeavors. However, it did not accomplish much in changing their lived experience. For instance, after the passage of the 14th Amendment that gave blacks citizenship in 1867, 500 thousands blacks voted in the election of 1868. Also, once freed, former slaves believed in the attainment of education being so necessary to self-improvement (Foner, 2017) that illiteracy among American blacks decreased from just under 80% in 1870 to about 11% in 1950 (NAAL, n.d.). Despite burgeoning enrollments at all-black colleges, the establishment of successful black businesses in all-black towns, and their engagement (or investment) in countless other activities to better themselves and prove themselves worthy of dignity and respect, their experience with whites generally did not change. With all things considered, blacks showed unyielding commitment to being as similar to whites as possible. Blacks by and large were Christians, made the church and Christian-values a staple of the community, were active in the political process, all but eliminated illiteracy in the black community, enrolling in schools, and established their own towns with their own economic institutions. Under such circumstances, the only thing that jeopardized their investment in these behaviors was something completely out of their control--their skin color.

Looking closely at the parameter of “involvement” in conventional activities to a degree that leaves little time for deviance (or criminality), this discussion also necessitates nuance when looking at the proto-Islamic groups. K.G. Muhammad (2019) speaks at length about how the national project of situating blackness as inherently and foundationally oppositional to notions of “normality,” and “whiteness” that were pivotal in the construction of black criminality began in the 1890’s. Understanding this, how is it possible that engagement in conventional behaviors of

any magnitude can minimize either deviance or criminality when ones skin color condemns them? Again, the behaviors and attitudes mentioned in the previous paragraph speak to the efforts at assimilation into the mainstream culture and norms, but they are condemned regardless as a result of something completely out of their control. Under such circumstances, whether the behavior is unscrupulous or not becomes irrelevant. It is also likely that this conundrum facing American blacks contributed to their willingness to not just abandon many of their attempts at mainstream acceptance, but also their willingness to be open and public in their rejection of and/or lack of desire to attain mainstream acceptance. From their point of reference, they were not going to be accepted regardless of what they did, or did not do.

The final parameter of interest is that of beliefs (or morality). To contextualize this discussion, attention is afforded to Bhabha's (2012) discussion of culture. Beginning around the 1880's, an American genre of popular culture was developed that situated both black manhood and womanhood as ostensibly opposite of conventional notions of decency, attractiveness, honesty, and sophistication. Composed of fixed signs, metaphors and metonyms, these ideas were joined by the understanding of black and white as polar opposites. Further, these ideas necessitated not only the cultivation of blackness as inherently threatening, but also a set of apparatuses of control, and brutal behaviors of obsessive vigilance that came to be known as lynching. Therefore, it can be reasoned that blacks, by being black, were barred from any substantial, or real participation in conventional notions of morality. The notions of morality that mainstream America subscribed to not only posited blackness as "immoral," but so much so that extra-judicial killings of black bodies were warranted according to this morality. Under such conditions it can be reasoned that participation in this particular brand of morality is not beneficial nor possible for blacks.

In applying Hirschi's measurements of bonding to the proto-Islamic groups of the early 20th century, their skin color was the primary barrier to bonding to the larger society. "Attachment" intends to speak to the degree to which an individual (or individuals) are sensitive to the opinions of others. However in the case of blacks in the early 20th century, any "sensitivity" they held to the opinions of whites were literally life-and-death matters rather than any sincere sharing of experience, perspectives, or values. "Commitment" entails a nuanced discussion. Blacks did in fact invest a great deal of energy into "committing" to behaviors that built communities, economic institutions, families, and social networks similar to those in the white community. But these behaviors did not change neither whites' perception of them, nor their experience in shared spaces with whites. "Involvement" as it relates to blacks during this period follows a similar theme. To be "involved" in conventional activities to such an extent that no time is available for participation in deviant behavior was not a reality for blacks during this period due to the construction of black criminality that was well entrenched in the American imagination. The situating of blackness as synonymous with criminality creates a circumstance in which behavior of any kind, is viewed with scorn, disdain, and inherently deviant. Participation in "beliefs" or sharing notions of morality too was barred from blacks during this period. Not only was blackness criminalized, but it is also juxtaposed to all that is fair, decent, and beautiful. A synthesis of why the proto-Islamic groups (as well as other blacks) did not bond well with the mainstream America can be summed up in the sentiments of Frantz Fanon (1952): "Wherever he goes, a black man remains a black man."

### Conclusion

Islamophobia is not new. This false understanding disavows a historical pattern of racial discrimination that has effected religious and ethnic minorities in the United States for

generations. Islamophobia in its contemporary form was first rooted in anti-blackness experienced by the descendants of African slaves. Although the Islam of African slaves generally did not survive, their descendants would reestablish Islam in their communities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the form of the Moorish Science Temple, and Nation of Islam. It is also during this period that the federal government began to express concern about the open rejection of ascribed racial identities, and the rejection of white supremacist ideology. Coopting the efforts of federal forces as well as local law enforcement, the federal government would engage in numerous campaigns to publicly discredit, create dissension within, and ultimately destroy these groups. Labeled under “extremist Muslim groups and violence,” the tactics of COINTELPRO is not significantly different from the Patriot Act and other resulting policies and practices that would emerge post-9/11. The experiences of Islamophobia attached to the proto-Islamic groups are more rooted in their experience of white supremacy, and Jim Crow laws. Being black, the anti-Muslim bigotry that characterizes their experiences arguably was a larger consequence of being black with their dissenting religio-political views and religious identity serving as secondary. It is in instances such as this that we see how Islamophobia intersects with other identities. It should also be noted that a black non-Muslim is still at risk of experiencing similar discriminatory experiences. In applying social bonding theory to the proto-Islamic groups, being black, their skin color served as a barrier to their bonding as “blackness” was stigmatized, and criminalized. Under such circumstances, the stigma associated with being black complimented at best, or trumped at worst any pathology associated with Islam. Black attachment is actually coerced deference, and while there was high level of commitment to emulating the white community, their experiences of discrimination continued. The stigma associated with “blackness” barred them from the realization of any benefits of having high levels of involvement or sharing beliefs.



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