

## **End White Dominance—Topic: Racism and Middle Eastern Communities 9.23.22**

Some researchers think that the term "Middle East" may have originated in the 1850s in the British India Office. However, it became more widely known when American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan used the term in 1902 to **designate the area between Arabia and India**. And often, the term is used in a cultural sense to mean the group of lands in that part of the world predominantly Islamic in culture.

Another term, the Middle East "Area" has been viewed by others as midway between Europe and East Asia.

Several major religions have their origins in the Middle East, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Arabs constitute the main socioethnic grouping in the region.

In the 20th century, the Middle East has been the scene of political turmoil and major warfare, including World War I, World War II, the Arab-Israeli Wars, the Iran-Iraq War and the Persian Gulf Wars.

Contemporary anti-Muslim racism grew especially out of the post-Cold War period when the United States began launching its imperialist wars in the Arab region and growing its support for Israel. Out of this context, anti-Muslim racism, based on the idea that all Middle Eastern people are Muslim and all Muslims are potential terrorists, was institutionalized through domestic and global policies and the United States corporate media's rhetoric.

For the cities in the United States, the **Detroit metropolitan area** in Michigan is home to the largest concentration of Arab Americans, followed by the New York City Combined Statistical Area; the Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area in California; Chicago Illinois; and the Washington DC area.

### **"Close to Home" for Patty O'Donnell**

It was March of 1991 and the United States was waging War on Iraq. I was State president of the Michigan National Organization for Women. I lived in Cheboygan Michigan almost at the tip of the Michigan mitten on the Lake Huron side, a small town. I got a phone call from Minnesota Public Radio asking if I had a comment regarding jokes a US Congressman from Michigan had made during a legislative dinner in Michigan's Upper Peninsula:

He opened with: It is a good night to pick on Iraqis... then he related jokes he indicated he'd heard on Capitol Hill. These are two slurs about Iraqi women –

- What do you call two Iraqi women going into a bar? Incoming Scuds.
- What is the difference between a catfish and an Iraqi women? One has whiskers and smells bad, and the other is a fish
- Another one suggested that Iraqi women had no teeth

He said that the jokes were blown out of proportion and that he "was only joking."  
I responded on the radio and in print.

## ***Leland School District Leelanau County Michigan***

### **New York Times 9.8.22 - Daring to Speak Up About Race in a Divided School District**

Stephanie Long is one of the school superintendents in my county of Leelanau and is Lebanese American who passes for white on and near the Leelanau peninsula such as Traverse City, where she has lived and worked as a teacher and school administrator since the 1990s. She keeps her ethnicity mostly to herself.

And one day in her first year she looked into one of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classes on her regular rounds. The teacher asked if she would like to read to the students. Picture books lined the lip of the whiteboard, and Long's eyes stopped on a book titled "Salam Alaikum." Before that day, she never had seen a book in a classroom that had an Arab character. Having grown up with Arabic-speaking parents and grandparents, she identifies as Arab. She chose the book. "Never, during my own schooling, never until college, did I see a representation of an Arab person in a book, never in a poem; it felt stunning." After reading the story, she told them that she was Lebanese and that Lebanon is a country in the Middle East. That was all. But when she walked out of the classroom, she was sweating because she had exposed herself, and because she worried that if word got back to parents and spread in the community, any of her efforts at reform regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion in the district would be seen as the crusade of "an angry Arab woman."

### **Additional**

**Anti-Muslim racism** within the system of policing takes a distinct toll on the lives of Muslim women. When officers like the Chicago Police Union President's post that "all Muslims deserve a bullet," it would not be a stretch to assume that Muslim women are not going to call the police for help when they experience domestic violence.

**The horrific post-9/11 backlash** that devastated Arab and Muslim American life with hate crimes, government surveillance, FBI raids, interrogation, arrests, detentions, due process violations, and airport policing. **In June of 2002, then Attorney General John Ashcroft** announced a "Special Registration" requirement that all males from a list of Arab and Muslim countries report to the government to register and be fingerprinted. In May 2011, the Obama Administration's Department of Homeland Security announced that it was indefinitely suspending the program under which this requirement was established. According to a statement that same month from the American Civil Liberties Union, the program never received a single terrorism-related conviction despite tens of thousands of people forced to register.

**The Trump administration** ramped up government attacks on people perceived to be Muslim through the Muslim Ban and the unleashing of the most egregious levels of hatred resulting in killings and hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. On the topic of the racial profiling of Muslims, former President Donald Trump stated, "I think profiling is something that we're going to have to start thinking about as a country." Trump's Muslim Travel Ban: On January 27, 2017, Trump signed Executive Order 13769 which banned citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries from visiting the United States for 90 days, indefinitely prohibited the entry of all Syrian refugees into the U.S., and blocked the entry of all other refugees for 120 days. The Muslim Travel Ban was a racist policy. It sought to keep out or deport people perceived to be Muslim based upon the racist assumption that "they" are violent potential terrorist enemies of the United States nation.