

Lesson Plan: Islamophobia in the Shadow of 9/11

Grades

10-12

Purpose

In this lesson, students will critically analyze various media for manifestations of Islamophobia. They will also learn to recognize the ways in which Islamophobia enters into discussion of social and political policy options.

Objectives

Extreme forms of Islamophobia are readily apparent. In this lesson students will learn to recognize subtle forms of Islamophobia in news media, in public discourse, and in academia.

Vocabulary

Islamophobia, terrorism, Al-Qaeda, subnational groups

Activities/Procedures

The following exercises may be conducted in small groups. Not all exercises need to be included in each group discussion. But Exercise #1 should be included in all discussions because it provides important definitions of "Islamophobia" that are relevant to each of the other exercises.

Exercise #1 – Islamophobia

Here are two definitions of Islamophobia:

An exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life. (*Ali, Wajahat, Duss, Matthew, Fang, Lee, Keyes, Scott, and Shakir, Faiz, 2011, Fear, Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America, Center for American Progress.*)

Islamophobia refers to unfounded fear of and hostility towards Islam. Such fear and hostility leads to discrimination against Muslims, exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political or social process, stereotyping, the presumption of guilt by association, and finally hate crimes...Islamophobia has resulted in the general and unquestioned acceptance of the following:

- Islam is monolithic and cannot adapt to new realities.

Overview

Islamophobia has been a significant feature in American life going back at least to the early 20th century and the portrayal of Muslims in the famous Rudolph Valentino movie *The Sheik*. But after the events of September 11, 2001, Islamophobia in America took on a new significance. Since then, it has played an important part in our national discussion of racial profiling, public security, foreign and military policy, and our sense of America as a 'melting pot.'

Islamophobia tends to be reinforced by 9/11 anniversary activities because remembrance activities and news coverage often fall into stereotypical characterizations and use language that emphasize Islam as 'the other,' a dangerous, threatening enemy. This phenomenon has been enhanced since the 2016 presidential campaign as inflammatory rhetoric has become a prominent element of public discourse.

This lesson plan is intended as a supplement to September 11 remembrance activities.

- Islam does not share common values with other major faiths.
- Islam as a religion is inferior to the West. It is archaic, barbaric and irrational.
- Islam is a religion of violence and supports terrorism.
- Islam is a violent political ideology.

(Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), <http://www.cair.com/issues/islamophobia/islamophobia.aspx>.)

How are these definitions similar? How are they different? Do you think it's true that there is "general and unquestioned acceptance" of the five statements in the second definition?

Have you observed or experienced any of the manifestations of Islamophobia described in

Exercise #2—Terrorism

Here are four definitions of terrorism:

"The term 'terrorism' means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." (*Title 22 U.S. Code, Section 2556f(d)*)

"The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological." (*U.S. Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms*)

"Terrorism is the use of violence against people or property to try to force changes in societies or governments." (*Danzer, G. 2005, The Americans, Boston; Houghton Mifflin/McDougal.*)

"Terrorism is the use of violence by non-governmental groups against civilians to achieve a political goal." (*Remy, Richard C., 2006, United States Government: Democracy in Action, Columbus, OH; Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.*)

These definitions have important differences. Which ones allow for the possibility that terrorist acts can be committed by a national government? Which ones consider that only noncombatants or civilians can be victims of terrorism?

Do you agree with the idea that only non-combatants or civilians (and not members of the military in active service) can be victims of terrorism?

The following four people either engaged in or headed groups that engaged in violent acts in pursuit of political goals. Would you consider each of them to be terrorists? Why or why not?

- George Washington
- Nelson Mandela
- Fidel Castro
- Yasser Arafat

What does it mean to say that “One person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter?”

Exercise # 3 – September 11 and the War on Terror

After the attacks on September 1, 2001, President George W. Bush declared a “War on Terror.” He said that the war would not end “until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.”

Ten years later, Lady Eliza Manningham-Buller, former director general of Britain’s Security Service charged with protecting the UK against threats such as terrorism, said that the September 11 attacks were “a crime, not an act of war” and that “I never felt it helpful to refer to a war on terror.”

The distinction between criminal acts and acts of war is a critical one. It has implications for:

- Foreign policy,
- Military action,
- Application of legal principles, both national and international, to such issues as acceptable interrogation techniques and the use of drones to kill suspected terrorists,
- Limitations on civil liberties.

Do you consider that the attacks on September 11, 2001, were criminal acts or acts of war? Why? What’s the difference?

Is it more precise to describe the events of September 11, 2001, as an attack on America or as coordinated attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? Why?

Which of the following best describes the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks:

- Al-Qaeda operatives,
- international terrorists.
- Islamic terrorists, or
- fundamentalist terrorists?

What makes your choice better than the other alternatives?

Exercise #4 – Evaluate a Textbook

Read the two selections from the 2006 textbook *United States Government: Democracy in Action* (written by Richard C. Remy and published by Glencoe/McGraw-Hill).

The first selection poses the question: How is the role of religion different in Islamic governments than in democratic ones? Note that the question counterposes “Islamic” and “democratic” as comparable adjectives describing types of governments. This statement would be more objective if it compared the role of religion in Islamic, Christian, Jewish or Buddhist governments or if it compared authoritarian vs. democratic governments.

The section called “Islamic Governments” begins with the sentence, “Islam is a religion spread

by the prophet Mohammad, who lived from A.D. 570 to 632.” Note the use of language: “Islam is a religion spread by...” rather than “Islam is a religion based on teachings...”

Analyze the rest of the first segment and assess how it addresses the issues raised in the definitions of Islamophobia in Exercise 1.

The second selection includes sections called “International Terrorism” and “A New Terrorist Threat.” The “International Terrorism” section links together terrorist attacks, Middle Eastern groups, Muslim fundamentalists, and the governments of Libya, Syria, Iraq and Iran. However, it doesn’t mention the fact none of the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks were from these four countries. Nor does it say that Libya, Syria and Iraq were among the most secular nations in the region at the time and were not involved in supporting “Muslim fundamentalists” who turned to terrorism to achieve “a return to traditional Muslim religious laws.”

The “New Terrorist Threat” section discusses the rise of Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, which it says “recruited Muslims and channeled money and arms to the Afghan resistance” to the Soviet supported government of Afghanistan. It does not mention that the U.S. also channeled money and arms to the Afghan resistance. Did the U.S. support of the Afghan resistance make the U.S. a state sponsor of terrorism?

Analyze the rest of the second segment and assess how it addresses the issues raised in the definitions of Islamophobia in Exercise 1. Pay special attention to incomplete, missing or misleading information that could cause the unwary reader to false or prejudicial conclusions.

Exercise #5 – Evaluate Newspaper Articles

Read the two newspaper articles “Good life returns to Timbuktu” (by Robyn Dixon, *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 2013) and “Jihadists Launch Surprise Attack” (by Kirsta Larson, Associated Press, *U-T San Diego*, February 11, 2013). Both articles address events in northern Mali but they are strikingly different in word choice and contextual facts.

The *Los Angeles Times* article refers to “militants,” “insurgents,” “extremists” “occupiers” “zealots” who “tried for nine months to impose their extreme form of Islam.” Among them were members of a group related to Al Qaeda. The *U-T San Diego* article refers to “jihadists,” “Islamic fighters,” “Islamic radicals,” “Islamic combatants,” “Islamic rebels,” and “Islamic extremists.”

Approximately 90 percent of people in Mali are Muslims, including members of the Malian army and residents of the city of Gao (the subject of the *U-T San Diego* article). So what clarity does repetitious use of the word “Islamic” bring to the story?

Thinking of the 5 statements in the definition of Islamophobia in Exercise 1, review the two articles and assess how each addresses the issues raised in the 5 statements.

Resources/Materials Needed

Chapter 25, Section 2 “Authoritarian Governments,” Remy, Richard C., *United States Government: Democracy in Action*.

Chapter 25, Section 4 “Global Issues,” Remy, Richard C., *United States Government: Democracy in Action*.

“Good life returns to Timbuktu,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 2013.

“Jihadists Launch Surprise Attack,” *U-T San Diego*, February 11, 2013.

These documents are included under the “Fair Use” provisions of the U.S. Copyright Act.

Supplemental Materials

“Anti-Muslim Hate Crime Rash Reported Around 9/11 Anniversary,” Hatewatch, Southern Poverty Law Center, <http://splcenter.org/blog/2011/09/16/anti-muslim-hate-crime-rash-reported-around-911-date>.

Cole, Juan, “Islamophobia and American Foreign Policy” in *Islamophobia and the Challenges of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, http://www12.georgetown.edu/sfs/docs/ACMCU_Islamophobia_txt_99.pdf.

Hess, D, and J. Stoddard, 9/11 in the Curriculum: A Retrospective, *The Social Studies* (2011) 102, 175-179, <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/vtss20/102/4>.

“Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West,” Gallup World, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/157082/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx>.

“Islamophobia worse in America now than after 9/11, survey finds,” The Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/mar/10/usa.religion>.

“MI5 former chief decries ‘war on terror.’” The Guardian, <http://guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/sep/02/mi5-war-on-terror-criticism>.

Nelson, Leah, *Backlash*, Southern Poverty Law Center, *Intelligence Report*, February 17, 2016. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2016/backlash>.

“Same Hate, New Target: Islamophobia and Its Impact in the United States,” Council on American-Islamic Relations and Center for Race & Gender, University of California, Berkeley, <http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/islamophobia2010.pdf>.