



Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy

Peter Gottschalk, Gabriel Greenberg

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In the minds of many Americans, Islam is synonymous with the Middle East, Muslim men with violence, and Muslim women with oppression. In the post-9/11 world, a clash of civilizations appears to be increasingly manifest and the War on Terror seems a struggle against Islam. These are symptoms of Islamophobia.

The term "Islamophobia" accurately reflects the largely unexamined and deeply ingrained anxiety many Americans experience when considering Islam and Muslim cultures. Historically, Americans have seldom given voice to these anxieties since they have had, until the last half-century, few connections to Muslim cultures and a small domestic Muslim minority. However, in times of crisis, such as the Iranian hostage situation or, most recently, the September 11th attacks, the long-simmering resentments, suspicions, and fears inherited along with a Christian European heritage manifest themselves most directly in conditions that appear to affirm Americans' darkest concerns. Like a vicious cyclone feeding off of its own energy, Islamophobia takes uncommon events as evidence fitting its worst expectations and turns these into proof that perpetuates those ill-informed expectations.

Islamophobia explores the presence of these anxieties through the political cartoon?the print medium with the most immediate impact. This book shows graphically how political cartoons dramatically reveal Americans' casual demonizing and demeaning of Muslims and Islam. And the villainizing is shown to be as common among liberals as conservatives. *Islamophobia* also discusses the misunderstanding of the Muslim world more generally, such as the assumption that Islam is primarily a Middle Eastern religion, where as the majority of Muslims live in South and Southeast Asia, and the misperception that a significant portion of Muslims are militant fundamentalists, where as only a small proportion are.

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