

Course Title: Understanding Islamophobia in America
Syllabus
IIIT Fairfax Institute

Overview

This course, taught by staff of The Bridge Initiative, examines the phenomenon of anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination in five two-hour sessions. Students will learn about the history of the term “Islamophobia” and its earliest manifestations; its parallels with similar prejudices that have affected other groups through time; the primary mechanisms that drive Islamophobia in the United States; its emergence in both liberal and conservative discourse; its manifestations in mainstream and social media; and creative ways to counter it.

Classes will include a lecture that introduces basic concepts and expands on the recommended readings. The presentation will be followed by an opportunity to ask questions, engage with one another in small group conversations, and participate in group discussions to not only learn about Islamophobia, but also offer ways about how to respond to and counter it.

Upon completing this course, students will have a foundational understanding of Islamophobia that extends beyond daily headlines, and should feel empowered to address issues of prejudice and discrimination in their own communities and beyond.

Instructors

Jordan Denari, Research Fellow, The Bridge Initiative
Nathan Lean, Research Director, The Bridge Initiative

Dates

Wednesday evenings on September 9, 16, 30 and October 7
6:00 pm-8:30 pm, with a break for Maghrib

Location

International Institute of Islamic Thought
500 Grove St, Suite 200
Herndon, VA 20170

Class One | Islamophobia: A History of the Word and Phenomenon

This class will examine Islamophobia through a historical lens, looking at its earliest manifestations in the United States. Students will learn about the first encounter between American sailors and Muslim pirates on the Barbary coast, and how those encounters and earlier ones by Europeans shaped views and generated tropes about Islam and Muslims. They will also learn about the evolution of the term “Islamophobia”, the debates surrounding it, and its journey from the pages of an early French text to mainstream news outlets in the United States.

- **Recommended Reading**
- “From Moorish-Indios to Park 51: A Brief History of Islamophobia in the United States” [Link](#)
- ““Islamophobia:” The Right Word for a Real Problem” [Link](#)

Class Two | The Newest Form of An Old Prejudice

In class two, students will learn about Islamophobia within a comparative context. We will examine other similar prejudices that have targeted minority groups through history — anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism — and also look occasions in which the United States government leveraged prejudice as a political tool, namely in the cases of the Bavarian Illuminati in the 18th century, and the Red Scare in the early twentieth century. Students will probe some of the possible causes of these prejudices, and discuss the ways in which contemporary Islamophobia is similar or different.

- **Recommended Reading**
- After Words with Peter Gottschalk [Link](#) (Video) (Also available as a podcast)

Class Three | The Three “I”s of Islamophobia: Imperialism, Industry, & Institutionalization

This class will look at three primary drivers of Islamophobia in the United States: imperialism, industry, and institutionalization. Students will learn about the way in which Islamophobia is tethered to American foreign policy goals in the Middle East. They will also learn about a well-funded network of individuals and organizations that emerged in the wake of 9/11 and manufacture fear of Islam and of Muslims. Additionally, we will examine how Islamophobia is institutionalized in the political arena, as well as other areas, and codified through legislation and policies that impact the lives of ordinary Muslims.

- **Recommended Reading**
- Imperialism:
 - “Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire” (Video) [Link](#)
- Industry:
 - “New Research Shows How Activists Use the Law to Make You Afraid of Muslims” [Link](#)

- “Behind Anti-Muslim Hype, Small & Self-Promoting Non-Profits” [Link](#)
- Institutionalization:
 - “Under New Anti-Terrorism Law, UK Schools Target Muslim Students” [Link](#)
 - “Since 9/11, U.S. policy enforces Islamophobia” [Link](#)
 - “If It’s Not “Islamic” Terrorism, Why Focus Solely on Muslims?” [Link](#)

Class Four | Bipartisan Prejudice & Media Influence

This class will look at Islamophobia across the political spectrum and show how it is a bipartisan project, contrary to popular assumptions,. Students will have an opportunity to learn about and discuss Islamophobia within conservative and liberal political circles as well as news outlets, and thus understand the different worldviews that shape different Islamophobic narratives. Additionally, this class will look at the influence of mainstream media and social media on Islamophobia, and how, in the age of Twitter and Facebook, the latter has taken a more active role in bringing awareness to this issue.

- **Recommended Reading**
- “It’s not just Fox News: Islamophobia on cable news is out of control” [Link](#)
- “New Study Analyzes Media Coverage of Islam Over Time” [Link](#)
- “The Rise of the New Liberal Islamophobia” [Link](#)

Class Five | Moving Forward

The last class meeting will be used an opportunity to reflect on the four previous weeks of material and discuss positive ways to counter Islamophobia. This will be an occasion for students to participate in group-discussions, brainstorm creative solutions, and learn more about existing networks that work on the issue of Islamophobia across the country. Students will also learn more about numerous initiatives that have been organized to combat Islamophobia in recent months and years.

- **Recommended Reading**
- “The Muslims Cosby Show” [Link](#)