

## **Muslim American Concerns and Struggles Post 9/11**

*Emily Liu*

### **Introduction**

One of the major societal changes that resulted from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks was the detrimental impact the tragedy had on Muslim Americans. Non-Muslim Americans unreasonably began to view Islam as a threat that bred violence and terror. These attitudes, combined with the ratification of the Patriot Act, endangered and restricted the civil liberties of Muslim Americans.

There are approximately 5 million Muslims living in the United States. It is impossible to portray the Muslim American community as a whole, since it is as diverse as any other religious, racial or ethnic community. However, the numerous experiences Muslim Americans have had facing discrimination post Sept. 11, along with their views of U.S. foreign policy regarding the Middle East, have resulted in the sharing of common perspectives and opinions about them.

Two academic semesters worth of interviews and research have brought me to the stories and findings detailed in this paper. I studied *Understanding Islam* with Ithaca College Professor Asma Barlas in the fall of 2004, at the time of the presidential election. Curious about the election attitudes of Muslim Americans, I conducted research and interviewed several Muslim college students and community leaders from different backgrounds to find out who they were supporting – President George W. Bush or Senator John Kerry and why. I found that all of my interviewees subscribed to the “anybody but Bush” attitude for two major reasons: (1) the Bush administration’s Patriot Act directly diminished their civil liberties and (2) they disagreed with Bush’s foreign policies regarding the Middle East, with the strong belief that the War in Iraq was and is unjustified. These Muslims Americans all had personal stories that tied in with these two factors.

The following semester, spring of 2005, I decided to re-visit this topic for my Print Journalism Workshop class with Ithaca College journalism professor Mead Loop. Since Bush had been re-elected, I set out to interview those same Muslim Americans to

find out if their attitudes had changed after the election and whether they still were unhappy with the administration given the current situation. Not only did I learn more about the attitudes *of* Muslim Americans, but I also became aware of Americans attitudes *toward* Muslim Americans.

It is important to note that my paper is in no way intended to illustrate the views of all Muslims. Rather, it is demonstrative of a majority opinion.

The significant findings are as follows: (a) nearly half of all Americans support at least one form of restriction on the civil liberties of Muslim Americans; (b) the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the media is one large factor driving the negative attitudes Americans have toward Muslims; (c) these negative attitudes, along with the Bush Administration's Patriot Act, breed discriminatory treatment of Muslim Americans; (d) in turn, Muslim Americans disapprove of Bush and his domestic policies and (e) Muslim Americans also strongly oppose Bush's foreign policies in the Middle East.

In sum, U.S. government policies under President George W. Bush have harmed the lives of Muslim Americans under the guise of making America safer. The people of this group in American society that has been largely ignored and disrespected by the government struggle to lead normal lives as large segments of ordinary citizens – their neighbors, employers, co-workers, customer service representatives, teachers, etc. – want to curtail their civil liberties. This complicity between the official U.S. assault on Muslims and the tacit and overt support for it within civil society, places Muslims in a dangerous position of being stuck in the middle, voiceless and powerless. My paper demonstrates how damaging such policies and attitudes are to Muslim Americans, and hopefully the reader will recognize the detrimental effects they could have on the United States' own long-term interests.