Introduction
The Problem of Islamophobia
Carl W. Ernst

In the summer of 2010, the attention of Americans was riveted by two controversies that erupted over the presence of Islam in the United States. One was the theatrical announcement of Pastor Terry Jones, leader of a small religious group in Florida, that he had put the Qur’an on trial for “crimes against humanity” and was planning to burn copies of it on the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks against American targets. This threat attracted worldwide condemnation, as well as pleas from international leaders and American officials to abstain from a highly provocative action, and ultimately Jones abandoned that particular plan. The other controversy was related to an attempt by an American Muslim group to establish an interfaith community center and place of worship known as Park 51 in downtown Manhattan, not far from the site of the World Trade Center. Although the project had been approved by a normal zoning process without objection, anti-Muslim bloggers created an enormous dispute by arguing that this so-called Ground Zero mosque was really intended to be a celebration of the 9/11 attacks as a victory of Islam over America. Eventually, the controversy died down shortly after the 2010 elections, leading some commentators to observe that it was a “manufactured story” that had been opportunistically used by politicians as a wedge issue to generate votes. In any case, the massive publicity given to both incidents illustrated the extent to which popular fear and suspicion of Islam, often linked to the 9/11 attacks, had become a widespread element in the climate of opinion in America. As this volume goes
to press, new controversies have erupted worldwide over a trailer of an anti-Islamic film, disingenuously entitled “The Innocence of Muslims,” evidently distributed by Islamophobic networks for the express purpose of fomenting both Muslim outrage and the predictable denunciations of Islamic irrationality. The forms and implications of this anti-Islamic prejudice in America, commonly referred to as Islamophobia, are the subject of the essays in this volume.  

Islamophobia is a complex phenomenon, and the authors represented here have approached it from a variety of perspectives. Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg treat it as a largely unwarranted social anxiety about Islam and Muslims, although they focus on the element of fear of Islam rather than other stereotypes. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri considers it to be a prejudice against Islam that is particularly associated with violence in media representations, although he emphasizes the similarity of Islamophobia to prejudice against other minority “out-groups” like Catholics, Jews, and blacks. Edward Curtis highlights the element of racism in Islamophobia, which he links to state repression of political dissent. Juliane Hammer draws attention to the importance of gender in images of terrorists and the construction of Islamophobia, although she cautions that particular examples of Islamophobia must be analyzed in terms of the particular political and intellectual currents that drive them. Andrew Shryock focuses on Islamophobia as an ideology related to nationalism and the problems of minority identity; he contrasts Islamophobic identification of “the Muslim as enemy” with the equally simplistic concept of “the Muslim as friend,” as found in Islamophilia. The basic point is that, for the many Americans who have no personal experience knowing Muslims as human beings, the overwhelmingly negative images of Islam circulated in the popular media amount to prejudice—defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “preconceived opinion not based on reason or actual experience...unreasoned dislike, hostility, or antagonism towards, or discrimination against, a race, sex, or other class of people.”

This book does not aim to defend Islam or present an idealized portrait of “good Muslims.” Nor does it intend to deconstruct all of the fantastic and exaggerated conspiracy theories, alleging that
Muslims are intrinsically violent because of their religion, and also inevitably hostile to the United States—a proposition that is sociologically inconceivable and unsupported by facts. No attempt is made here to go into the distorted and hysterical campaign to banish the sharia as a source of American law, which is a solution for a nonexistent problem, and one that in its most extreme form would outlaw Muslim religious practices such as marriage contracts and wills. Furthermore, this is not the place to examine the fraudulent and alarmist argument that a higher Muslim birthrate will overwhelm the white populations of Europe and America—a familiar claim from the racist playbook of other anti-immigration bigots. Instead, this book offers important insights into Islamophobia as a conflict over American identity, which draws upon a deep well of bitterness toward racial and religious minorities.

There is a long history of negative stereotypes of Islam in European and American culture, parts of which are sketched here in the essay by Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg. This history goes back to medieval diatribes against Islam by Christian clerics, although it took on especially potent forms during the colonial era, when European colonial administrators and Orientalist scholars justified the conquest of Asian and African lands by the “civilizing mission” that was being brought to inferior peoples. The term “Islamophobia” was popularized in a 1997 report by a British think tank, the Runnymede Trust, drawing attention to this form of prejudice as a serious social problem. Before 2001, survey data on American opinions regarding Islam revealed a fairly even split between positive and negative impressions of Islam, although the majority of Americans registered no opinion at all because of lack of any knowledge. But that balance has shifted over the past decade, as negative perceptions of Islam have become more widespread.

Focusing more precisely on the association between Islam and violence, ten years ago, only 25% of Americans believed that Islam encourages violence, while 51 percent disagreed with that position; as of 2011, 40 percent say that Islam encourages violence, while 42 percent do not.

The opposition to the Park 51 community center in New York is only one example of a larger phenomenon of opposition to the
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establishment of mosques and Islamic centers in the United States. This opposition has taken the form of vandalism and arson as well as organized attempts to block mosque construction by legal challenge.\textsuperscript{10} The American Civil Liberties Union has documented the extent to which anti-mosque activity has taken place in dozens of different locations around the United States.\textsuperscript{11} One unlikely site for such a protest was Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where the local Muslim community had been holding prayer services for years without attracting any notice. When the construction of a new Islamic Center was approved in 2010, organized resistance by mosque opponents took the form of arguing that Islam was not a religion protected by First Amendment guarantees, but a political movement aiming at the imposition of sharia law in America. The US Department of Justice disagreed and filed a brief maintaining that Islam has been recognized as a religion since the time of Thomas Jefferson (this action contrasts with the 1964 case in which the Department of Justice unsuccessfully argued against the religious status of the Nation of Islam, as discussed below by Edward Curtis).

The rise of anti-Muslim propaganda in the United States has connections with right-wing activists, whose attacks on Islam are often well funded. A recent report by People for the American Way has documented the menu of tactics that is often used by anti-Muslim extremists. In addition to claiming that Islam is not a religion and that Muslims have no First Amendment rights, these ideologues use misinformation to argue that all Muslims are dangerous, and that liberty must be defended by taking freedoms away from Muslims. The political angle is evident in attacks on Islam that are also linked with criticism of President Obama, but the enemies list is often expanded to include “leftist radicals” as alleged Muslim allies.\textsuperscript{12} Another report, by the Center for American Progress, draws attention to seven right-wing foundations that have provided over US$40 million to support Islamophobia between 2001 and 2009, particularly through five dedicated anti-Islamic think tanks headed by Frank Gaffney, David Yerushalmi, Daniel Pipes, Robert Spencer, and Steven Emerson. These professional Islamophobes are supported in a less-formal manner by a network of websites, bloggers, and news outlets that systematically amplify anti-Islamic messages, frequently in a tone that is crude, aggressive, and intolerant. In turn,
there is a notable group of elected officials and former presidential candidates—all Republicans—who regularly employ anti-Islamic rhetoric to make political capital. Similar documentation has been provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which has also tracked an increase in anti-Islamic hate groups. What is especially remarkable, with all the money flowing into this propaganda machine, is how profitable it can be to bash Muslims. A reporter for The Tennessean, Bob Smietana, noticed how much attention the Murfreesboro mosque controversy was getting from outside groups, and his investigative reporting unearthed a veritable treasure trove of money being made by key players on the anti-Islam circuit. Millions of dollars, funneled through shadowy front organizations, have also supported the distribution of anti-Islamic propaganda on a massive scale. Only weeks before the presidential election of 2008, 100 newspapers and magazines across the country distributed millions of DVDs of a documentary entitled “Obsession: Radical Islam’s War against the West,” in Sunday editions, and 28 million more DVDs were mailed directly to voters in swing states. The film has also been repeatedly shown on Fox News TV. In lurid and alarming scenes, the film (distributed by an otherwise unknown organization called the Clarion Fund, Inc.) bluntly intercut images of Muslims and Nazis to make the point that they are basically the same. These are only a few examples of the kind of anti-Muslim activity that seems to be carried out on a wide scale with significant funding in a highly politicized context.

One of the especially troubling aspects of institutionalized Islamophobia has been in the area of police training, especially given the vast amounts of funding diverted to the new security regime immediately following on the 9/11 attacks. Vast new powers of surveillance, spying, jailing, and interrogation (including the “enhanced techniques” often considered to be torture) were being regularly employed by American officials, largely against Muslims. It was perhaps inevitable that this regime should prove vulnerable to manipulation by anti-Muslim ideologues eager to be paid as “experts” on terrorism. Investigative reporting by Wired.com has revealed that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has sponsored training for its counterterrorism agents presenting mainstream Islam as violent and radical, and depicting the Prophet Muhammad
as a “cult leader.” Other reports have shown that the pressure on the FBI to produce results has often relied upon questionable use of informants and agents provocateurs to create flimsy plots that could be then broken up and paraded as investigative successes. On the level of local policing, it is even more remarkable to see how easy it is for self-proclaimed “terrorism experts,” with no professional qualifications whatever, to get hired in order to provide deeply flawed anti-Islamic guidance for local police forces. Companies that provide “training” for thousands of law enforcement agents and security personnel commonly portray Islam as a terrorist religion intent on subverting the United States from within, and they dismiss mainstream Muslims and prominent Muslim organizations as nothing but radical extremists attempting to impose the sharia on America. In light of this national pattern of police indoctrination with Islamophobic materials, it is perhaps unsurprising that the New York Police Department showed an anti-Islamic film to over a thousand officers in another training exercise. This film, “The Third Jihad” (a sequel to the “Obsession” film mentioned above), actually included a cameo appearance by Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, despite the fact that he had earlier denied that the film was being shown to the police; Kelly was forced to make a public apology amid cries for his resignation, though he was defended by Mayor Bloomberg. The essential message of this film, again, was that American Muslims are planning to infiltrate and dominate America, and so any claims by Muslims to be “moderate” are part of a devious pattern of deception. The impact of this mentality seems to be demonstrated by Associated Press reports revealing over six years of New York City police spying on Muslims in mosques, small businesses, and universities over a wide region. The secret “Demographics Unit” responsible for this apparent abuse of civil liberties has not generated a single lead or uncovered any evidence of terrorism.

It is also disturbing to see evidence of the dissemination of anti-Islamic propaganda by US military forces in counterterrorism training similar to what has been found in police forces. There is unfortunately a track record of the use of classic textbooks of racist ideology being employed and recommended by military authorities, for instance in books purporting to explain “the Arab mind.” It is
particularly alarming to see a military leader like Lt.-Gen. William Boykin, who has played a prominent role in the “war on terror,” make public denunciations of Islam as a threat to America, and claim that Islam does not deserve religious freedom protections under the First Amendment. Repeated complaints about training courses with anti-Islamic content led the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, to order a comprehensive review of these courses in April 2012 to expunge bigoted materials.

One of the most extreme examples was a course for senior military officials that dismissed Geneva Convention protections for Muslim civilians and contemplated Hiroshima-like destruction of Islam’s holy cities. Another instance was a target at a Navy seal firing range depicting a Muslim woman wearing a head scarf and firing a gun, with framed verses from the Qur’an over her shoulder; this was removed by Navy officials after protest by an American Muslim group. While top military officials clearly regard Islamophobia as incompatible with American foreign policy and military doctrine, the presence of anti-Islamic prejudice in the military is evidently still a problem, to judge from notorious recent events involving US troops abusing bodies of Afghan fighters and burning Qur’ans.

It is hard to say whether the organized networks of Islamophobia have in fact had the chief responsibility for pushing American opinion against Islam. There are clearly sectors of American culture that are predisposed to be hostile to Islam in any case. While it is true that conservative and evangelical circles typically hold anti-Islamic attitudes, as Juliane Hammer points out in her essay, there are also plenty of liberals who are quick to denounce the alleged sins and shortcomings of Muslims. Furthermore, as Kambiz GhaneaBassiri observes, news media and elected officials benefit from the fear of Muslim terrorism with enhanced revenue or political power. So, in effect, Islamophobia fits into certain structural aspects of the way American society deals with recent minorities during times of crisis. Anti-Islamic rhetoric draws upon the repertoire of religious bigotry as well as traditional American racism, but it is given a particular spice by the element of gender and stereotypes about oppressed Muslim women. Ultimately, as Andrew Shryock concludes, this kind of prejudice is a distortion and a distraction from the real issues
that confront America. Understanding the nature of this kind of prejudice is therefore essential for getting beyond it.

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The five articles presented in this book display a broad spectrum of analyses of the phenomenon of Islamophobia from a variety of angles. All of them are based on thorough research on the history and sociology of anti-Islamic prejudice. All the authors are specialists who have written extensively on Muslims and Arabs in America and the way they have been perceived. Their findings reveal important moments and incidents in the story of American Islam, and they provide thoughtful reflections on the causes and consequences of the hostility toward Muslims that has become such a common attitude in recent years.

Historical background is provided by Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, who are well known for their trenchant study of anti-Islamic political cartoons. Exploring the connections between British and American views of Islam over three centuries, they address enduring stereotypes and anxieties focused on Muslims, beginning with the standard eighteenth-century portraits of Muhammad by Humphrey Prideaux and Voltaire, which depicted him (with somewhat contradictory logic) as both an impostor and a fanatic. Perhaps, because of their limited contact with Muslims (outside of Tripoli and the Philippines), Americans tended to rely on the advice of the British, who claimed extensive experience with Muslim subjects in their Indian colony.

Gottschalk and Greenberg dwell at length on how Islam became perceived as a threat in America, despite the lack of any recognized Muslim presence in the Western hemisphere (since enslaved African Muslims were not normally counted). It is striking to see how the fictional possibility of American Muslims was used as an extreme hypothetical example, as when the 1789 Constitutional debates on the “religious test” for the presidency entertained the notion that even a “Mahometan” could be considered for that office. It was evidently only after the 1857 Indian revolt (largely blamed on the Muslims and the last Mughal emperor) that British officials began to subscribe to a paranoid suspicion of a Muslim threat to their
dominion, and American missionaries went along with fears of a
global Muslim conspiracy. This British and American antipathy
toward Islam fostered the belief that Islam was spread only by the
sword—for who could accept this fanatical religion except under
threat of violence? This ideological portrait of Islam (the historical
record does not support the notion of conversion to Islam by force)
fulfilled the imperatives of the European concept of world religions
in conflict seeking world domination. This Manichean vision of
struggle between forces of light and darkness has left its legacy in
apocalyptic depictions of Islam, alongside the Catholic Church, as
vehicles of the Antichrist in opposition to evangelical truth. The
recurring theme of the fear and threat of Islam in eighteenth-
to-twentieth-century America, reinforced in this fashion by the per-
spective of British colonialism, helped to consolidate the concept of
Islam as a single homogeneous whole, an essentialized portrait that
was severed from any historical context. The continuing global cir-
culation of these stereotypes from America has encouraged Muslims
to draw the conclusion that the US security regime (the global “war
on terror”) is an assault on Islam, the fulfillment of the clash of
civilizations.

Focusing on the contemporary situation, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri
draws upon survey data and American religious history to discuss
the treatment of Muslims as “out-groups,” like other racial and
religious minorities that have come under suspicion and persecu-
tion in the past. Anti-Muslim prejudice today, driven by fears of
threats to national security, sees Islam as a dangerous movement
bent on world domination, and therefore views Muslims as poten-
tially disloyal and un-American. While it is true that a small group
of individuals and well-funded organizations are responsible for
manufacturing anti-Muslim propaganda, often channeling it into
protest against the construction of mosques, there are larger fac-
tors behind this complex and multifaceted problem. Both the news
media and the political elite seem to thrive on the fear of Muslim
violence. Journalists routinely refer to religion as the basis of terror-
ism, and their lack of incentive to explain complex issues often ends
up reinforcing existing prejudices. Politicians of all stripes have been
quick to meet fears of violence by expanding state power, which is
rarely curtailed. Crises of confidence in democratic institutions have
a long history in America of raising suspicions about minorities, who can be seen as deviants from the mainstream of the American civil religion. Anti-Catholic prejudice questioned the loyalty of American Catholics, whose true allegiance was believed to be due to a foreign leader (the Pope), and anti-Muslim ideologues make the same charge against Muslims today. In a similar fashion, anti-Semitism was widely fashionable and is still quite common, despite its public condemnation in recent years. The multiple ethnic identities of American Muslims added the element of racial difference to their religious identity. So despite efforts by Muslims to assimilate to American norms since the 1950s, the perceptions of Muslims as “other” inevitably drew upon the exclusion of Africans and Asians from equality with whites. It should not be forgotten that racial minorities have been treated differently by state and local governments over the years, and that only since 1964 did civil rights legislation permit nonwhites to defend their liberties.

Thus, it was that early African American Muslim movements, such as the Moorish Science Temple of Noble Drew Ali, found their attempts to claim religious freedom undermined by racial prejudice and the imposition of state surveillance. A major shift came with the popular success of Alex Haley’s “Roots,” a TV serial that for the first time conveyed to a broad audience of white Americans a compelling narrative about the history of enslaved Africans (including Muslims). While the Nation of Islam had alarmed white Americans with its racial rhetoric, Elijah Mohammed’s son and successor, W. D. Mohammed, proclaimed his acceptance of an American Islamic identity as he steered his community out of their former confrontational stance. Ironically, although President Barack Obama has proclaimed his Christian faith, his racial otherness and his Muslim family connections have once again raised suspicion that any association with Islam may be un-American. GhaneaBassiri concludes that, while bigotry and prejudice have regularly played roles in the building of American cultural unity by suppressing diversity, attacks on out-groups divert attention from real crises and often lead to the expansion of state power and the erosion of civil liberties.

The article by Edward Curtis takes us further into the subject of race and its connection with anti-Islamic prejudice. Curtis assembles extensive documentation of state repression of political dissent
related to Islam. He argues that this state surveillance was accompanied by an FBI disinformation campaign carried out through the media and counterintelligence measures. Things were not always so; since the eighteenth century, a handful of educated Muslim slaves from Africa, like Job Ben Solomon, attained celebrity status and elite sponsorship in England and America, although they were often expected to serve Western commercial interests and avoid raising questions about equal rights. But in the atmosphere of 1920s’ America, with the rise of nativism and the exclusion of nonwhite immigration, conversion to Islam by African Americans took on a sharp political profile, raising FBI suspicions about the foreign connections of American Muslims. The Nation of Islam was only one of several African Muslim organizations that took form at this time, and the presence of Indian missionaries of the Ahmadi sect plus other organizers with African connections raised further concerns among American officials. FBI surveillance during the Second World War (including the arrest of members of the Nation of Islam for draft evasion) conflated demands for civil rights with communism and a possible alliance with the Japanese. The Black Muslim scare of the 1960s continued this pattern, as the Department of Justice unsuccessfully argued in the Supreme Court that the Nation of Islam was a cult undeserving of First Amendment protections of religious freedom. Overt FBI actions against the Nation of Islam went beyond wiretapping to include briefings of journalists and the leaking of damaging information about Elijah Mohammed in an attempt to undercut him. The problem for African American Muslims was that immigrant Muslims from the Middle East were classified as whites, while the Black Muslims were discredited on racial lines. The situation worsened when an American Muslim, Mohammed Ali, challenged the US war in Vietnam on religious grounds as a conscientious objector, with the result that he was imprisoned and stripped of his Olympic boxing medals.

As Curtis observes, in the post-9/11 era, the focus of American anxiety has shifted from Black American Muslims to brown foreigners, but regular procedures continue to include the suppression of critiques of US policies and the rewarding of Muslim groups that remain apolitical and uncritical. Thus, surveillance is being carried out on an unprecedented scale, with further actions including selective
suspension of civil rights, false accusations against critics like Army chaplain James Yee, shutting down Muslim charities, and outlawing even training in peace techniques for groups labeled as terrorists. Despite legal challenges to such policies in some court decisions, the official policy of the Obama administration includes authorization for assassinating US citizens without trial, if they are declared to be supporters of terrorism. The FBI and major police departments still interact with Muslim groups by enrolling informants and employing them as agents provocateurs, creating cases that can then be successfully “solved.” Under the current incentives of the security regime, it is likely that the application of state Islamophobia will continue, with race being a continuing factor.

There is another element of Islamophobia that has received surprisingly little attention, and that is gender. Juliane Hammer argues that Muslim women are on the center stage of the construction of Islamophobia and the images of terrorism. Like GhaneaBassiri, she sees Islamophobia as a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the conspiracies of anti-Muslim ideologues. But she widens the field of associations to include domestic politics, imperial wars, feminist negotiations, and “Western” claims of superiority—and it includes the polite Islamophobia of liberals as well as conservatives. The gendering of terrorism is explicit in the stereotypes of male Muslim terrorists, who by definition must be suppressing Muslim women. Oddly, the American news media condemn Muslims for being homophobic (as in the Abu Ghraib scandal), at a time when homosexuality continues to be denounced by leading American political and religious leaders. Yet, Muslim women, whose voices are rarely sought out, are regularly both attacked in anti-Muslim hate crimes and viewed with pity as victims who need to be saved from their own religion. Genuine issues of domestic violence (which exists in every community) have been seized by opportunistic Islamophobes as another weapon for bashing Islam. Real discrimination against Muslim women exists in America, including discrimination in the workplace, different public treatment, and abuse of veiled women. Hammer cites examples of Islamophobia directed against Muslim women that underline the importance of racism and fear of minorities as motives. Hysterical attempts to create anti-sharia legislation implicitly target Muslim women, by creating paranoid fantasies of
Muslim takeovers of the Constitution and the imposition of veils and burqas on American women.

In the political realm, as Hammer points out, neoconservative attacks on Islam generally include a gender-equalitarian and women’s rights perspective. This ostensible intervention on behalf of women oppressed by the sharia reinforces Islamophobia among Americans; it claims to be interested in saving Muslim women while simultaneously casting them as foreign and dangerous, in this way turning women’s bodies into the tools of political agendas of imperialism and minority discrimination. Nowhere is this more evident than in the condescending feminist concern about the oppression of Afghani women, which conveniently justified the 2002 invasion of Afghanistan, although such concerns did not arise in the 1980s when Ronald Reagan praised the Afghan mujahedin as freedom fighters. The picture of gender and Islamophobia is further complicated by a notable presence of strident anti-Muslim women, such as Pamela Geller, whose organization Stop the Islamization of America has been designated as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Another regular feature is the prominence of “native informants,” self-proclaimed Muslims or ex-Muslims (often women) who offer insider denunciations of Islam to eager audiences in best-selling books and lucrative appearances on the lecture circuit. It is, nevertheless, difficult to categorize secular feminists, who may not always line up with neoconservative agendas, though there are plenty of examples of what Gayatri Spivak called “white women saving brown women from brown men.” Likewise, some Muslim feminists may criticize gender oppression while maintaining a Muslim position. Hammer concludes by pointing out that Muslim women remain at the intersections of feminist leftist agendas with liberal and neoconservative ones. Clearly, further research is needed on related topics such as Muslim masculinities, homophobia, and women’s agency and voices responding to Islamophobia.

In the final article of the volume, anthropologist Andrew Shryock offers a case study of what is clearly the most Arab and Muslim city in America: Dearborn, Michigan (or in the words of anti-Muslim blogger Debbie Schlussel, “Dearbornistan”). He situates Islamophobia primarily as an ideology related to nationalism and problems of minority identity. The problem is that
Islamophobia defines Islam as unacceptable in the modern state, and Muslims as incapable of being true citizens—though this turns out to be difficult to define in practice. In this murky situation, national identity ends up being defined by a negotiation between law (legal citizenship) and custom (true Americanness). Shryock then takes the further step of pointing to the shortcomings of Islamophilia, the multicultural opposite of Islamophobia, which claims that Muslims are “good” while still sharing assumptions with Islamophobia about the nature of citizenship and national identity. One problem is that Muslims do not benefit from unity-building exercises like Holocaust commemorations in Europe, or American affirmative action—existing stereotypes condemn Muslims for retrograde positions on religion, gender, and politics. Surprisingly enough, Muslims in the United States are nevertheless very trusting in public institutions, perhaps because they are generally well educated and prosperous in comparison with European Muslims.

In effect, according to Shryock, simultaneous processes of mainstreaming and marginalizing Arabs and Muslims regularly take place during Middle East conflicts or US wars against Muslim countries, since Arabs and Muslims inescapably retain an ambiguous role that is not seen as fully American.

Dearborn has become the principal venue for anti-Muslim figures (like the Qur'an-burning pastor, Terry Jones) to come and rail against Islam in public. Officials in the city, which has a 40 percent Arab population, have become accustomed to handling these provocations by legal maneuvers that skirt on abridging the freedom of speech. Interfaith groups and journalists in Dearborn have defended Jones’s freedom of speech while condemning his ignorance. However, mixed messages are the rule, as civic officials routinely congratulate Arabs and Muslims in the Detroit area when newly constructed mosques are inaugurated, while at the same time, new levels of police surveillance are enforced. FBI monitoring of mosques leads to enthusiastic efforts by Muslim leaders to demonstrate full Americanization, even while they stay on alert for infiltration by informers. The FBI informs Muslim leaders that they will be fine as long as they only talk about “true Islam”—evidently as understood by the US government.
Shryock points out that the pressure for Americanization is nothing new for Detroit Arabs. This has been a regular feature of political crises for years, because the Arab and Muslim communities have been solidly established in the Detroit area since the late nineteenth century. The assumption that Muslims are either foreign-born or African American means that Muslim Americans must be new, alien, and from somewhere else—not fully American, in other words. This exclusion buys into the Orientalist banishment of Islam from the West, and the assimilationist model of American citizenship that calls for the abandonment of all foreign ways. Continuing ties to Arab homelands may have generated advocacy for Palestine or opposition to US-supported dictators, but such moves have frequently collided with American public culture and US foreign policy; in the post–Cold War era, having a Muslim enemy has become a key part of American national identity.

But Islamophobia cannot be cured by simply saying that Muslims are good people. To use the language of political scientist Carl Schmitt, shifting Muslims from the category of enemies (Islamophobia) to friends (Islamophilia) simply perpetuates the same essentializing logic, but with an equally distorted positive view of Islam. The shortcomings of the “good Muslim, bad Muslim” model are all too evident, since there are real differences among Muslims, and Shryock demonstrates this point with an amusing recital of the characteristics of the “good Muslim” stereotype. Requiring the “good Muslim” to be the unimpeachable US citizen automatically alienates any Muslim who has criticism of particular US policies. Islamophilia therefore is bound to be a failing proposition, for even as Muslims become more American, the bar for acceptance is set higher, since no one really believes that they have even denounced terrorism. A better remedy is to call for a situation in which no religious group is singled out to prove their loyalty (consider Rep. Peter King’s investigation of Muslims as un-American); opponents of Islamophobia should criticize racism and bigotry rather than attempt to idealize Islam. Shryock acknowledges that Arab and Muslim Americans have been subjected to “processes of marginalization and mainstreaming that are abusive and extreme,” having to demonstrate patriotism and loyalty
while simultaneously being exhibited by the State Department as examples of American tolerance and minority success. But the friend–enemy distinction can only be overcome if Muslims and non-Muslims recognize each other as an inescapable part of the same zones of interaction.

Obviously, much more could be said on the subject of Islamophobia, particularly in relation to the hatred of Islam that is so prominent in evangelical circles. It is also worth exploring in detail the way in which right-wing politicians exploit the fear of Islam in a cynical and opportunistic manipulation of credulous public opinion. In any case, it is to be hoped that calm and dispassionate exploration of the roots of prejudice, as presented in this volume, will be helpful in allowing Americans to move beyond the scapegoating and demonizing of religious minorities; American citizenship and the freedoms that go with it are far too valuable to be compromised in the name of irrational and bigoted identity politics.

Notes

2. Earlier versions of these articles were presented in a plenary panel session on “Islamophobia in America” at the annual conference of the Middle East Studies Association of North America in December 2011.


29. On the concept of contest between religions for world domination, see also Carl W. Ernst, Following Muhammad, pp. 37–69.


32. For those who still are under the impression that Muslims have not ever denounced terrorism, see the extensive list of “Islamic Statements against Terrorism” compiled by Charles Kurzman, at http://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism/, accessed September 15, 2012.