

Homeland Security: The Modern Day Red Scare

Perceptions of Modern Islam in American Society

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By

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Over two hundred years ago before the United States was officially formed, a unique American culture different from that of mother-land England had began to emerge. Starting with John Winthrop's idea of creating a society that would be "a city upon a hill" through a government created based on the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers, and through the civil rights era, America has prided itself on being a forward-thinking, civil rights champion and a role model for other societies. The Statue of Liberty warmly welcomes refugees from other countries, and we have often times referred to ourselves as the melting pot of the world. This unique American culture that has so proudly announced its acceptance of diversity, has actually used diversity in a negative way to unite American people against a common enemy.

In times of chaos and fear, American people have often looked to point the finger at a certain group, religion, or idea that far extends pass just women and African-Americans. American society continuously looks to blame others- a phenomenon the government actually uses to gain power and unite Americans. We will first look to history to see how the public and influential leaders during the Salem Witch trials, Japanese Internment, and McCarthyism all have placed blame on a minority under the leadership of the government as a way to answer social problems and as a way for the government to gain power. We will then look at the modern issue of how in the grand scheme of things, this continues today with the making of Muslim-Americans and terrorists to be synonymous and the role the government has played in uniting the American people against a common enemy. In a country that was supposed to be the land of freedom for those being persecuted, our society and government continues to persecute others.

I. From Witch Hunts to the Red Scare

Not unlike other periods in history, the Salem Witch Trials persecuted women. In her article “Retelling Salem stories: Gender Politics and Witches in American Culture,” Marion Gibson takes an in-depth look at three prominent times in America (including the 1690’s) in which women were persecuted as witches. Gibson concluded that “in each period witches have reared their usually ugly heads at moments of national crisis.”¹ As Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum would go on to explain in their text *The Social Origins of Witchcraft*, the late 1600’s were a chaotic and scary time for colonists.² It was a time of great dispute between neighbors, family members, government officials and more on issues so dear to the colonists such as property.³ Since the governor of the colony was overthrown in 1689, who else were to blame in the 1690s because certainly there must have been someone to blame. The circumstances of living in the colonies themselves were not to blame and certainly not the governor since he had already been overthrown. In this chaotic and confusing time, people only looked to point the finger.

Perhaps a more interesting argument was first made in 1867 by author and historian Charles Upham. In his book, *Salem Witchcraft*, Upham goes as far to suggest that the “purpose of restoring and strengthening the influence of the clerical and spiritual leaders”⁴ was the cause of witch-hunting. Therefore, not only was witch-hunting a reaction by the colonists to hard times and chaos, it was also used by influential leaders to gain power.

¹ Gibson, Marion. "Retelling Salem Stories: gender politics and witches in American culture." *European Journal of American Culture* 25, no. 2 (2006): 85-103.

² Boyer, Paul and Stephen Nissenbaum. *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Upham, Charles W.. *Salem Witchcraft*. New York: Dover, 2000.

This reaction to catastrophic incidents and the opportunity embraced by powerful leaders continued 250 years later with World War II and the Japanese Internment Camps. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Presidential Executive Order 9066 in 1942 requiring that Japanese Americans in California be put in camps, saying that it was for their own protection. Interestingly enough, one second generation Japanese-American questioned the motives of the United States government asking, “If we were put there for our protection, why were the guns at the guard towers pointed inward, instead of outward?”⁵ According to Greg Robinson, by March of 1942 over 112,000 Japanese-Americans were moved to 16 concentration camps.⁶ Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Americans had already begun to feel uneasy about Japanese expansion in the Pacific. Furthermore, unlike many immigrant groups, Japanese immigrants had refused to assimilate and instead set-up small towns and groups to keep their heritage.⁷ This made Americans uneasy about the minority and overzealous after the attack. Using an executive order, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Japanese-Internment Camps flexing his unchecked executive power. This led to racist, anxious attitudes from Americans towards Japanese-Americans, and was encouraged if not provoked by the United States government with the issuing of Order 9066.

This reaction by American society and our own government further continued into the Red Scare of the 1950’s and McCarthyism. By looking at how Washington received its information about supposed communists in the government, it becomes clear that a stressful and chaotic time made Americans (including the government) too ready to point fingers and place

⁵ Robinson, Greg. *By Order of the President: FDR and the internment of Japanese Americans*. The Library of Congress, via: http://books.google.com/books?id=GCFT3SXwsWQC&dq=Executive+Order+9066+Robinson&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=HcimS6DpGIXGIQfFwJ10&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CA4Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Executive%20Order%209066%20Robinson&f=false, 2001.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

blame. In his article “Louis Budenz, the FBI, and the ‘List of 400 Concealed Communists’: an Extended Tale of McCarthy-Era Informing,” author Robert M. Lichtman shows how surreal these trials and accusations really were.

As with witch hunts, the government was paranoid and uniting the people against a common enemy. In exchange for his own criminal investigation to be closed, ex-communist Louis Budenz agreed to partake in several interviews with the FBI, each one containing about 700 questions, all regarding every aspect of the communist life-style and organization.⁸ Soon enough, Budenz had created lists of people he claimed were communists, regardless of if he could prove it or not.⁹ It is undeniable that people watched what they said in fear of being named a communist during the 1950’s; however what is more intriguing is that the government spent so much time being more paranoid than their own citizens, that the government is to blame for the mass confusion. Had the government not spent so much time and effort into investigations, like that of Budenz and listening to the fabricated lists and communist jargon Budenz created, the American society would not have built up a fear of the Soviet Union and the spread of communism which was labeled a threat to democracy, and this democratic nation.

Like the case in the witch-hunts, Washington was using this fear of communism in America to unite the American people against a common enemy: communists and the Soviet Union. In times of crises the great leaders always seize the opportunity to present a solution by blaming a certain group or people, a religion, or an idea. It is all too common in American history that behind the support of leaders and in times of chaos the American people have united

⁸ Lichtman, Robert. "Louis Budenz, the FBI, and the "list of 400 concealed Communists": an extended tale of McCarthy-era informing." *American Communist History* 3, no. 1 (2006): [25-54].

⁹ *Ibid.*

and pointed the blame towards a certain group. The years after September 11, 2001 would be no different.

Perceptions of Islam in a Paranoid Society:

Not unlike the witch hunts of the previous centuries, the discrimination of the Japanese-Americans in WWII, or the constant hunt for communists in the 1950's, the years after 9/11/2001 have been a constant bashing of the Islamic faith and Muslim-Americans in the search for terrorists. Directly after the attacks there were several violent acts across the country on mosques, Muslim-families' homes, and on the religion.

Perhaps the most common attack on the religion itself has been about the treatment of Muslim women. After studying Judaism, Christianity, and Islamic texts it has become apparent that the Islamic faith was set-up in a way to treat women with greater respect than those religions and cultures of the west. Polygamy is often an argument against Islam by western society as being demeaning to women. Polygamy is a practice that is in fact evident in religious texts from all three religions, and in fact the Qur'an had much more to say on the status of women than the Bible or the Torah and allowed women to have a higher status in religion and society. The fact that western cultures are attempting to attack a religion that actually supports women's rights more than their own religious texts do seems to suggest a society searching for reasons to attack a religion. It is not Islam that is treating women badly, but individuals and governments of a muslim-majority; therefore it is unfair to blame Muslims for treating women badly when in fact the religion itself does not call for this.

The most important fact to remember about 9-11 was that it was an organized group of individuals, not the religion itself. After terrorists attacked the United States the American people

became paranoid about all Muslims, not stopping to think that it was not the religion but a few individuals from a foreign country. After the attack on Pearl Harbor the American society ganged up against all individuals of Japanese descent, although the acts committed in war were not from our own Japanese-Americans. Still, America turned on its own diversity. In the years after September 11 America has attacked members of our own society because of their descent or religious background. President George W. Bush created the Department of Homeland Security, whose job at that time was to find terrorists and keep the continental United States safe. Although all Muslims were not rounded up and put in a guarded camp, many have felt like they need to prove themselves in order to be protected in the United States in fear that their cultural differences would cause problems. As pointed out by Army Chief of Staff, General George Casey, Jr., many young Muslim men joined the United States army after the terrorists attacks as a way to support the country that they most identified with- the United States.¹⁰ General Casey went on to explain that our society has put so much pressure on Muslim-Americans that many felt that they had to enlist and show patriotism in order to not be discriminated against and prove themselves as an American.¹¹ It is sad that in a modern society people have to make decisions about their lives so that they will not live in fear, even in a democratic society. This is not to say that those Muslim-Americans only enlisted as a way to avoid persecution by their own country. Many Muslim-Americans, whether they have enlisted or not, feel a strong connection to this country as Dr. Salahuddin Malik has pointed out.

General Casey offered his words after the more recent incident at Fort Hood, Texas this past November. After Major Nidal Malik Hasan killed twelve fellow soldiers, one civilian, and

¹⁰ Berger, Joseph. "Army Chief Concerned for Muslim Troops." 11/8/2009: The New York Times http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/09/us/politics/09casey.html?_r=1 (accessed 2/12/2010).

¹¹ Berger, Joseph. "Army Chief Concerned for Muslim Troops." 11/8/2009: The New York Times http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/09/us/politics/09casey.html?_r=1 (accessed 2/12/2010).

injured several more, headlines across the country read of a Muslim soldier possibly linked with terrorists who went on a killing spree. Days after the shooting the *USA Today* published a political cartoon by Nate Beeler depicting Uncle Sam cutting down a massive tree symbolizing “Islamic Extremism” in the Middle East, while a tree trunk cracks the surface of the United States at Fort Hood.¹² This mere image shows this idea in American society that while we are fighting “Islamic Extremists” A.K.A terrorists in the Middle East, attacks of Islamic Extremists are taking place right here in our own country. It is undeniable that many soldiers have acted out on their return from the war and have felt the great pressure from American society, and many failed to realize directly after this shooting, that Major Hasan was against the war, just like many other Americans. The fact that he was a Muslim made him an extremist and a terrorist in the eyes of the American society and even in the government. Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut even went on national television to say that the actions by Major Hasan are possibly “the most destructive terrorist act to be committed on American soil since 9/11.”¹³ Eight years after September 11 the government is still calling out Muslim-Americans who oppose the war as terrorists. Unfortunately, many people will listen to the government and hear Sen. Lieberman’s words and agree that this was strictly an act of terrorism.

So how far has the government really come since those days of the witch trials? As Charles Upham had concluded in 1867 that the clerical leaders would use these events to bring Americans closer together for the cause of the church, so has the government continued to do even through today. President George W. Bush used September 11, 2001 as a day to unite the American people for his cause he called the “War on Terror” that included a war against those who were not even involved in the September 11 attacks. The Department of Homeland Security

¹² Beeler, Nate. *The USA Today*, 11/13/2009, 13A.

¹³ Lieberman, Joe. FOX News, 11/12/2009.

issued their Homeland Security Advisory System which repeatedly bleats out the color symbolizing our likely hood to be attacked by terrorists. Since the last terrorist attack which was now nine years ago, we are currently at our lowest level that it has ever been since the implementation of the system, which is : Yellow: Elevated “A significant risk of terrorist attacks.”¹⁴ One step below this is “A general risk of terrorist attacks,” a level we have never been at though the last attack was nine years ago.¹⁵ Former President George W. Bush, the Department of Homeland Security, and most recently Sen. Joe Lieberman are using this system and the shooting at Fort Hood as a way to give the government and military more power by uniting the people against terrorism and living in fear.

Under the direction of the government, media outlets also published stories and articles inflicting fear in the American society, which in return many people have taken out of proportion and actually attacked Muslim-Americans and the religion. Once again, the government and American society have created a new prejudice as a way to unite people and place the blame on a certain group of people.

It is important to mention, however, that not all Americans and members of the government feel this way. General Casey of the United States Army also went on several news shows to urge people not to point the finger at Muslim-Americans and not to say that he was a terrorist. Casey himself feared that the stress put on other Muslim soldiers would cause them to back out of the army because of all the bashing of Muslim soldiers by American society following the incident at Fort Hood.¹⁶ General Casey appeared on CNN’s “State of the Union”

¹⁴ The Department of Homeland Security, "Homeland Security Advisory System." http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/Copy_of_press_release_0046.shtm (accessed 2/15/10).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Berger, “Army Chief Concerned for Muslim Troops”, 2009.

shortly after the shooting to express his feelings saying that “As great a tragedy as this was- it would be a shame if our diversity became a causality as well... A diverse army gives us strength.”¹⁷ As mentioned before, America may not have an abundance of oil; however we do have diversity which in this statement, even Casey argues is a great strength of our army, as well as our country. It is also a shame that the government and culture of American society for centuries now have been so blind to this and over anxious to blame people. It seems that diversity has actually caused many problems in the United States and that the government, whose job, Hobbes would argue is to create a peaceful society in which men are not placed against one another, has actually had a hand in creating a paranoid society.

Observations Today

As we can see, American society has continuously let fear consume them in acting out against a certain group of people. Generally, such as in the cases discussed throughout this paper, in times of chaos and troubles, American society has looked to place the blame on certain groups of people and their beliefs or ideas. Unfortunately the government and media have played a very influential role in creating these feelings within the society. It would be wishful thinking and too simple an answer to try to change those in power to be more realistic and less power hungry; however it is realistic to better educate the American people. The answer to solving this problem is to embrace diversity starting in communities.

In the past six months I have conducted a survey on a single college campus asking students how they felt about Muslim-Americans, the attacks on 9-11 and how their college experience has changed any misperceptions they may have had. A variety of students with

¹⁷ Casey, George. CNN News, “State of The Union,” 11/12/2009

different backgrounds, majors, educational experiences and grade level were interviewed; however there was an overwhelming response that even college campuses are not doing enough to create cultural understanding and to build bridges between different cultures. Several students in the survey said they were unaware of any classes or clubs that addressed these issues, including classes required through the general education requirements of SUNY standards. If we can better educate people on the reality of different cultures, American society might be able to overcome its differences and embrace diversity. This national phenomenon of acting out in times of crisis under the leadership of the American government is wrong. Furthermore, as evident through the Crusades and British Imperialism in India, this concept referred to as Islamphobia by Dr. Malik, has been a worldwide trend. Instead of jumping to conclusions, looking to place blame, and the government provoking fear, we need to step back and use historical and cultural knowledge to stop prejudice and the on-going Islamphobia.

An important issue raised by students at The College at Brockport is the treatment of women in Muslim societies. Because this is one stereotype that is often brought up in today's society, an analysis of the three main religions of the West, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, is needed to start breaking down these stereotypes. By starting to research a topic so important and misconstrued, I hope others will be encouraged to start breaking down the walls between the West and Christianity, Muslims and the Islamic Faith. The following is an example of stereotypes that exist in our society today regarding Muslim women that extends beyond terrorism.

Comparative Perspective of the Status of Women

Various religions have taken different perspectives on the role of women, and their place in society. Three major religions of the world, that while have common heritage, have been the biggest threats to one another, and possibly to women's rights. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are "related" religions that have been fighting over various issues for centuries.

A more modern argument by western Christian and Jewish societies has been the poor treatment of women in Muslim countries. Often times Americans have referred to Muslim women being treated as property or chattel. It has become such a major issue in recent times that articles, movies, and shows have integrated this stereotype of Muslim culture into their storylines. In his recent speech to Muslims and non-Muslims across the globe, President Barack Obama even made women's rights his sixth point- mentioning it along other important topics such as the economy and the Iraq War. This shows the importance of the issue of women's rights as a global issue that needs to be addressed.

Because of the arguments raised by western civilizations, an analysis of all three religious views on the role of women in society is necessary. In doing this it is important to go back to the origins and most important law of each religion. For Judaism this would be the Torah, for Christianity the Bible, and for Islam the Holy Qur'an. The findings in this paper will be based on these three main texts with various views from experts in the religions. This is not to say that the religious views in today's societies have not changed at all; since the creation of each of these religions several smaller branches or parts have grown, each with their own varying ideas. Also, ideas based on the growth and development or the regression of societies have greatly influenced religious practices today; however, this paper will examine the scriptures and direct words of

God through the prophets that the Torah, Bible, and Qur'an represent and that all branches of each religion follow. For the purposes of this paper we will look at the basic principles of each religion as they are presented in each of the Holy texts.

It is also important to recognize the chronological order of the texts and their respective religions. Of these three religions, Judaism is the oldest with the writings of Moses through the Torah, and later the "Oral Torah" known as the Mishnah. Christianity followed with Jesus and a focus on the Bible (especially the New Testament), and finally the youngest of the three religions, Islam with the teachings of Muhammad through the Qur'an, which is seen to be the direct word of Allah. It is important to note that some points will overlap since the three religions have common heritage. This is especially the case with the Old Testament for both Judaism and Christianity.

It is undeniable the importance of finding peace amongst these three major religions of the world today, and by comparing their original beliefs, as scholars we will be able to find common heritage and hopefully, areas we can improve upon. The status of women in each religion is an important topic as a global issue today, and by dissecting the three holy texts, we will examine each religion's take on the role of women.

I. Judaism

The oldest of the three religions, Judaism dates back thousands of years with the creation of the world as shown through the Torah and the book of Genesis in the Old Testament. In the creation of mankind, it is important to note that Eve was created from Adam. In this way, the Old Testament shows that women were seen as man's lesser, and that it was Eve who was thought to

be weak enough to commit the original sin. As Genesis 3:16 states, God told Eve, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” This shows that men had control over women right from the beginning of creation, and that women were not equal to men. The practices of men and women as shown through the Old Testament further show this idea, as will be shown in Section II.

This idea of men having control over women is further described in the Mishnah. The Mishnah has been referred to as the “Oral Torah.” It was the passing down of messages through stories, memorization, and repetition, until C. 200 A.D, when the massive persecution of the Jews made it necessary to make the “Oral Torah” in writing, for fear that it would be forever lost and forgotten with the persecution of their kind. Therefore; the Mishnah dates back to 200 A.D. and has been very influential throughout Jewish history in keeping the beliefs and original stories alive. According to Judith Romney Wegner in her study of the treatment of women in the Mishnah, Jews were taught a basic belief that there is “X” and “Not X” with no in between, meaning if something were not “X,” then it was completely different- there was no half way or middle ground.¹⁸ This concept was applied to the ideas of men and women. Women were not men; therefore they were completely different, having no middle ground. In this way, women are seen in two different lights according to Wegner: 1. a person, and 2. Chattel or property to be owned and controlled. Wegner argues, “In the mishnaic system, this ambivalence sometimes

¹⁸ Judith Romney Wegner, "Tragelaphos Revisited: The Anomaly of Woman in the Mishnah," *Judaism: a Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 37, no. 2 (1988): 162.

reduces women from the status of person to the status of chattel, “and that “her otherness results in her exclusion from men’s world altogether.”¹⁹

This idea is proven in the Mishnah itself. As stated in Mishnah *Ket* 4:4, the father has control to arrange the marriage of his minor daughter.²⁰ Also, if something were to happen to the girl, such as rape or misuse, fines should be paid to the father of the girl, not the girl herself.²¹ If the young woman is not happy with the marriage, she does not have the right to divorce her husband- that right is again left to her father. The father can undo all vows and take back his daughter, with or without her will.²² In this way, the father has much control over the daughter when it comes to marital rights, while the daughter has none. On the contrary, grown women have more privileges than minor girls. In comparison, an adult daughter makes her own decisions about whom she will marry, collects payments for violations against herself, and her father cannot make her divorce her husband.²³ In this way adult women do seem to have more freedom and control over themselves.

On the issue of divorce, while fathers cannot get involved in their adult daughters affairs, the daughter herself does not have the right to divorce her husband. According to the texts of the Mishnah, a husband can divorce his wife for no reason; however she does not have this ability.²⁴

¹⁹ Wegner, 163.

²⁰ Eugene J. Lipman, Ed. "Ket." In *The Mishnah; Oral Teachings of Judaism* 4:4. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Lipman, Yeb. 14:1.

As seen as his property, she has the right to petition to a court to convince him to let her go; however she cannot herself divorce her husband no matter what the circumstances may be.²⁵

Furthermore on this topic, Rabbi Jonathan Ginsburg of Metropolitan University describes in his video post that women do not have the right to divorce their husbands; however they also cannot be divorced against their will, as told in the book Deuteronomy of the Old Testament.²⁶ According to Rabbi Ginsburg, if the woman were to get divorced against her will she would have to receive compensation.²⁷ In these ways it is apparent that women did not have equal rights to men as far as the ability to divorce, because women were seen as property to men to do what they liked with. Men could divorce wives at will, like property; however because women were not seen as equal to men, they were not given this right. On the contrary, women were still seen as human beings as they were offered compensation and the right to petition for a divorce.

It is also clear through the Mishnah that women's ability to carry a child is seen as a property owned by the male husband. If the male were to die, his property should be given to his brother- including his wife. According to Wegner on the issue from Mishnah Yeb. 4:7, if the husband were to die "we find that her husband's brother acquires use of her sexual function and control of her marriage portion."²⁸ This is to say that the reproductive quality and ability to bear children is seen as a property of the male that can be inherited in the event of his death. This shows that women had no right to their own body and reproductive organs. This is completely male dominated and oppressing to Jewish women.

²⁵ Lipman, Gut. 7:1-5, 7:10.

²⁶ Rabbi Jonathan Ginsburg, "JewU 127," Metropolitan University, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6QEafwqBn4-> (accessed November 4, 2009).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Wegner, 165.

On the contrary, if the husband were to die, leaving no one but his widow behind, than she is free to remarry as she pleases and control her own property.²⁹ Therefore, if there is no male to take over the widow as property, along with any actual property the husband were to leave behind, than the woman is in control of herself and the property inherited from her husband. In this sense, we can almost compare this to slavery. Women's reproductive organs were inherited like any other piece of property upon her husband's death; however if there were no other dominating male to step in and take his place, then she was free of her duties to him.

This leads me to the right of owning property. According to the Mishnah, if a woman already owns property and then gets married, the "married woman retains title to her property, which she can actually sell," as Wegner points out.³⁰ This is an important right granted to women since statute at the time of these scriptures greatly depended on ownership of land. We can then conclude that women are allowed to own, control, and sell their own property as they wish, and that no man may come in to marriage for the sake of gaining the woman's property because it will still belong to her.

Rabbi Ginsburg further acknowledges women's right to own property in discussing a story from the book of Numbers in the Old Testament. According to Ginsburg, five daughters of a deceased man were having their property taken from them, leaving them with nothing. They ran to Moses to ask if this was possible, in which Moses responded he did not know and would have to check with God. According to the Bible, God acknowledged that the girls were right and that they should be allowed the land of their father, and He immediately amended the law so that

²⁹ Wegner, 165.

³⁰ Ibid, 167.

the daughters could inherit property.³¹ This was thousands of years ago and yet shows the basic Jewish belief that women do have the right to property.

The last point I'd like to discuss is the belief of polygamy. Many times throughout the Old Testament it is shown that men have more than one wife, such as with Abram, as will be discussed in Section II. In her text Wegner points out that "in polygynous culture of the Mishnah, even a monogamous husband may legally have sexual relations with other women, as long as they are not married to other men."³² Therefore, it is evident that polygamy is evident in the origins of Judaism, which in today's society is often seen as degrading to women; however we will further examine this point later on.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that women were not seen as equals to men, and that in some cases women were treated as property of the father or husband, while at other times women were seen as lesser human beings than males, but still granted rights, such as with marriage and property. These are basic views of women based on the traditional Jewish literature and experts on Judaism.

II. Christianity

The arrival of Jesus Christ brought about the first major shift from Judaism to the new religion of Christianity. Technically speaking, this means we should focus more on the New Testament; however because Christians study the Bible in its entirety, we shall look at the Bible as a whole.

³¹ Ginsburg, "JewU 127."

³² Wegner, 167.

As stated earlier, Genesis 3:16 is when God punished Eve for committing original sin, and informed her that she was to be submissive to Adam, and that he would rule over her; however this is not the only evidence of the oppression of women in the Bible. In the New Testament, Paul relives the story and struggle of Jesus and says several times how women are suppose to be obedient to their husbands. I Corinthians 11:3 states, "... the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."³³ In this scripture apostle Paul is telling the order of rule. In other words, orders go from God to Christ, then Christ gives orders to man, who in turn is to order women. In this chain, women are put at the very end, while Paul justifies man's superiority over women. This line shows direct evidence of oppression of women in the New Testament justified in religion.

Furthermore, I Corinthians 14:34-36 states "let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."³⁴ This quote shows a few ideas. First of all, this too represents the oppression of women by men as justified by the Bible. It also briefly touches on education. Paul is not saying that women should not get an education, but that it should be a private matter done in the secrecy of one's home. Therefore on one hand he is allowing for women's right to education, yet holding them back by saying if it must happen, only allow this to occur in a private sector. Furthermore, this quote shows that women do not have the right to free speech nor the right to have say in the church. The fact that Paul refers to women talking in church as a "shame" is very degrading to women. This also fuels an on-going debate about

³³ | Corinthians 11:3

³⁴ | Corinthians 14: 34-36

women's roles in the church. Here the text is saying that church is a public, male issue, and that women should have a minimal role and instead listen to the men of the church. Cheryl Hauer, the U.S Director of Education for Bridges of Peace, and organization bringing religions together addresses this issue in her discussion of "Islam, Christianity, Judaism and the Treatment of Women." Being a female minister herself, Hauer says that she is under the supervision of her husband and former male minister and that she had received their blessings to pursue this career.³⁵ This shows the struggle of Christian women to gain a voice in Christian churches, from Paul, to modern day ministries. This is not to say, however, that women did not hold leadership positions. The Bible does offer different examples of women leaders, rulers, and judges, though they appear much less often, and really are an exception to the general roles of women in Christian faith.

This idea is further addressed in the book I Timothy of the New Testament. I Timothy 2:11-15 states:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing.³⁶

This again is evidence in the Bible of oppression of women in regards to educational rights, as well as the right to have a voice in church. This scripture also reinforces the idea of male

³⁵ Cheryl Hauer in "Islam, Christianity, Judaism and the Treatment of Women." Crossover Productions. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCDcQ1Hm7X0> (accessed November 10, 2009).

³⁶ I Timothy 2:11-15

dominance and superiority. Again, it is said that women should not have control over men, and that men are superior because in creation Adam was created first, and it was the woman, Eve, that committed original sin. This quote is very strong and forceful in its various meaning of holding women back from their natural rights.

Evidence of oppression in the Bible does not stop there. The order of the submission of women to superior male figures occurs again in Ephesians 5:22-24:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands.³⁷

As well as in Colossians 3:18, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husband, as it is fit in the Lord,”³⁸ and in I Peter 3:1, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands.”³⁹ In these ways it is clear that the origins of Christianity believed women were ruled by men, and in a way seen as the property of men.

However, women in Christianity were granted control in some aspects, especially with the raising of children. As seen in Isaiah 3:12, though women are to be subjects of their husbands, the children are to be ruled by the mothers, “As for my people, children are their

³⁷ Ephesians 5:22-24

³⁸ Colossians 3:18

³⁹ Peter3:1

oppressors, and women rule over them.”⁴⁰ In this way women are given a dominant position in which they have the right to raise children as they see fit. This is seen as the main role of women: to be caring mothers.

Further protection and respect of women as mothers is further granted in Exodus and Deuteronomy when it is said that children are to be punished if they do not listen to either of their parents or if they hurt one of their parents, father or mother.⁴¹ Here we see that mothers have the same rights and protection that fathers have, and are seen as equals when it comes to parenting. We must not forget that mothers are mentioned in the Ten Commandments, again ordering children to obey mothers and fathers equally.

Other than in parenthood, further protection of women is shown in the case of rape in the book Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 22:29 states that “If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay the girl’s father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the girl, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives.”⁴² This religious law protects women’s rights in the way that it does not allow for men to do whatever they like with women- there are some limits. Though the fine is paid to the father, the woman does see some justice in the situation, and a fine of fifty shekels most likely was convincing enough to keep the number of rapes down.

Owning property as a Christian woman, according to the Bible, is a more difficult task. According to Numbers 27:8 of the Old Testament, daughters are to inherit nothing if there is a

⁴⁰ Isaiah 3:12

⁴¹ Exodus and Deuteronomy, The Old Testament

⁴² Deuteronomy 22:29

son.⁴³ All property would go to the male heir. If no son is left behind, then the property may be split up amongst daughters.⁴⁴ Therefore, in the Christian faith women do have the right to own property, it is just more difficult for women to acquire such lands. If a woman has a brother, she will not inherit any property, or if there is more than one daughter, land would be split up, and over generations eventually would leave very little property, if any to say so.

The final point to touch on, again, is going back to the idea of polygamy. In Judaism polygamy was allowed if wife could not bear a child. This is the same case in Christianity. Since the main purpose of women in the eyes of the Bible and Christian authorities is to bear children, if a wife cannot bear children, a man is allowed to take on more wives in order to have children. Reproduction is an important part of Christianity; therefore, if a woman could not get pregnant, taking on more wives would be encouraged. Polygamy occurred several times throughout the Bible such as with dominant figures Lamech, Jacob, Esau, Gideon, and many more. Perhaps the best example and most influential of all polygamous relationships is that of Abraham (Abram). This story relates to both Christianity and Judaism, since Isaac is a major figure in these faiths. According to Genesis 16: 1-4:

Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had
a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And
Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath
restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my

⁴³ Numbers 27:8

⁴⁴ Ibid.

maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai...gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived.⁴⁵

The story goes on that Sarai (Sara) ended up bearing a child, Isaac, while Hagar bore Ishmael.⁴⁶ This is a classic example of polygamy for the sake of reproduction in the Christian faith. Sarai herself gave permission to Abram to have her maid, which shows that polygamy is not only allowed, but that it is not necessarily degrading to women, as many of modern societies see it as.

It is clear here that Christian women according to Holy Scriptures have been greatly oppressed and looked down upon. If anything, I would conclude that Judaism had a more positive outlook of women than did that of Christianity. The status of women in Christian society is to be submissive, obedient to a dominant male figure, either father or husband, have no educational rights, no rights of free speech and involvement in public affairs, and have very few rights as to obtaining property. It is true that women's main role according to this religion is that of mothers, but in most cases women are seen as inferior to men in these original beliefs. Again, this is not to say that these beliefs still exist in changing societies today, however, this is what the doctrine of Christian faith tells us about the role and status of women in God's world.

III. Islam

Continuing the story of Abram, Sara, and Hagar, Abram took his son Isaac to Jerusalem where he carried on Judaism, which eventually led to Christianity. Abram's other son, Ishmael,

⁴⁵ Genesis 16: 1-4

⁴⁶ Ibid.

instead went to Arabia where eventually the city of Mecca grew, and as time went on led to the birth of the prophet Muhammad, and with him the religion of Islam. Islam is perhaps the most controversial religion in regards to the treatment of women in today's world, through the eyes of western countries. To examine the religious view of the status of women, not the modern societal views, let us turn to the Holy Qur'an as told through Muhammad and which is believed to be the direct word of God. We should note that as I do not read Arabic, this is a translated version, which Muslims do not prefer. In most of these holy texts, the wording would be exactly the same as the day it was written.

The first observation I made when consulting other sources is that the Qur'an has a lot more to say on the status of women compared to the previous two religions we have examined. One of the causes for this as believed by many recent scholars is because Muhammad himself had great respect for his first wife, Khadijah, and that Muslims have an understanding that mothers are of significant importance and suffer very much to bear and raise all the children of the world. It is true, however, that based on my findings the Qur'an does not entirely treat women as equals to men, though it does address women's rights more often and in a more just and light way.

For instance, Surah 2:228 states that "[Women] have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them."⁴⁷ In this quote it is evident that men are still seen as being just above women, however, here, it is a slight difference, much smaller than that of what we see in the holy texts of Christianity and Judaism. This line even distinctly

⁴⁷ Khan, Muhammad Zafrulla. *The Quran : The Eternal Revelation Vouchsafed to Muhammad, the Seal of the*

Prophets / Arabic Text with a New Translation by Muhammad Zafrulla Khan. New York: Olive Branch Press, 1997,

Surah 2:228

says that women actually do have rights, even in comparison to men. This is pretty significant for this time, as well as in comparison to other religions of the day.

On the topic of equality, Surah 2:282 says “And call two witnesses from among your men, two witnesses. And if two men be not at hand, then a man and two women.”⁴⁸ Based on this statement, when it comes to witnesses, two women are equal to one man. This clearly demonstrates that men are still seen as having higher status in the public eye than women. This is further stated in Surah 4: 176, “Unto the male is the equivalent of the share of two females.”⁴⁹ So although men in Islam are said to be worth more, in a sense, than women, an important point that this shows is that women are acknowledged as human beings. Even though Muslim women are still oppressed to a certain degree, they are still mentioned, and seen more as equals than females of the previous two religions.

Furthermore, there is still this belief of men having some sort of power over women, as in Judaism and Christianity. As stated in Surah 4:34:

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Surah 2:282

⁴⁹ Surah 4: 176

⁵⁰ Surah 4:34

This message brings up many different factors. First of all, as in the other religions this shows that men are in charge of women once again. Again, men are superior to women because Allah made it that way so it is the job of the woman to be obedient and submissive to her husband. In comparison to Judaism and Christianity, however, the idea of men being in charge of women seems to be less harsh and degrading. In Islamic scripture, it seems that men are in charge of women; however that makes the man have a duty to take care of her, not for the wife to take care of the husband. It is a much lighter tone than that of the previous religions we looked at. The final thing to note about this quote is that it does mention the punishment of women. This is an idea that did not show up in any of the other readings of Holy texts that I performed; however here it is a clear commandment, just as the children were to be punished for disobeying parents in Christianity. This may be taken as more of a harsh ruling of women by men in the faith of Islam.

Along these lines of women being controlled by men, as in the other two religions, it seems that the reproductive ability of women is again seen as a property of the husband. Surah 2: 223 says to men, “Your women are a tilth for you (to cultivate) so go to your tilth as ye will.”⁵¹ Again, this is as if to say that the reproductive ability of women is a property of the man to do what he wishes with. In this sense I feel all three religions are harsh on women, and oppress women as far as their rights to their own body. However, marital rape against a wife is still not allowed in this religion. The main point to get out of this text, however, is that though it may not be as direct as the other religious texts, it is still evident that in some ways women are seen as inferior and partly as property, due mainly to the female anatomy that allows women to bear children.

⁵¹ Surah 2: 223

On the right to own property and inherit land, the Qur'an seems to speak more of women's rights than the Bible does. Hauer of the Bridges of Peace organization, and a devote Christian agrees that Islam and Judaism both originally allowed for women to own property.⁵² Though it is not equal rights to that of men, the Qur'an does provide evidence of women's rights to property such as in Surah 4:11, "To the male the equivalent portion of two females, and if there be women more than two, then theirs is two-thirds of the inheritance, and if there be one (only) then the half."⁵³ In all cases here, the Qur'an states that all female children get a piece of the property. Again, this is a remarkable law for this time. If there is only one son and one daughter, the daughter gets a share equal to that of the brother, which in any time period seems like a fair deal. However, there is still this idea of the male being favored over females when more daughters are in the family. As shown here, if there is more than one female, the daughters get less property than that of the brother. Therefore, women in Islam do not have equal inheritance rights as men; however they are guaranteed a piece of the property, and are allowed to own land, which is remarkable for historical texts in the first place. Also, according to Dr. Salahuddin Malik of The College at Brockport, 632 A.D was the first time women were acknowledged as being able to own property and inherit land, which is an idea quite ahead of its time.⁵⁴

As discussed in the sections on Judaism and Christianity, polygamy is also allowed in Islam. I bring this point up because in today's societies, many people across the globe look down on Muslims for taking more than one wife, including Muhammad himself. Many today feel that

⁵² Hauer

⁵³ Surah 4:11

⁵⁴ Dr. Salahuddin Malik, personal communication

the practice of polygamy is degrading to women. While it may be, I bring this point up to show that the practice of polygamy occurs in all three religions, not just Islam. As told to men in Surah 4:3, “marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four.”⁵⁵ This shows that just as in other religions, it is allowed here, and that other than being a part of culture, polygamy is a religious ideal, not necessarily practiced to degrade women. Furthermore, according to Muslim scholar Malik whom has studied the Qur’an, men are to treat all their wives as equally as possible and try to not love one more than the others.⁵⁶ Many western civilizations feel that having more than one wife is unfair and disgraceful to women; however it is evident here that all three of these major religions, at least in their origins, allowed for polygamy. A concluding point about polygamy to draw from this is that polygamy is allowing for men to have more than one wife, whereas women cannot have more than one husband. So in this sense, polygamy does not hold women to equal rights to that of men, in the sake of taking on more than one spouse, in all three religions.

The final point of importance for understanding women’s rights in Islam is by examining the importance of the veil in the Muslim religion. Western countries often view the wearing of the veil to be an unjust oppression of Muslim women by the religion. Contrary to this belief, I have found only one quote in the Qur’an that can be related to this societal, not religious belief, in Surah 24:31:

⁵⁵ Surah 4:3

⁵⁶ Malik, personal communication

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save their own husbands... And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment.⁵⁷

This quote is not necessarily about hiding every inch of skin, but more about being modest, and caring enough about oneself to protect and cherish the body. In my studies I have found nothing in the Qur'an advising women to hide every part of their body, but rather to take care of it and not flaunt it. Malik also agrees with this idea, having recalled his own experience of studying the Qur'an and realizing that hiding a woman's body from head to foot was an oppression that did not need to occur based on Islamic readings and beliefs.⁵⁸ It can be concluded then that the veil is more an introduction of society, and should not be associated with oppressing Muslim women, based on faith. Overall, Muslim women have also been viewed as not entirely equal to men; however more light is shed on women's rights in the Qur'an than the other religious texts.

IV. Conclusions

An overall analysis of the religious texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam show that each religion in one way or another has allowed for the oppression of women. Based on my findings however, we can conclude that some religions treat women worse than others, based

⁵⁷ Surah 24:31

⁵⁸ Malik, Class lecture 10/29/2009

strictly on their holy texts and origins. We must also remember the factors of society and culture that play a role on this topic. For instance, economic status, living conditions, job opportunities, and other values of a society in general contribute to the treatment of women, not just religion. Having said that, we need to be more careful when pointing fingers and labeling the oppression of women, for instance, with Muslim tradition, when the act itself is not necessarily tied to the religion, but the society as a whole.

This is an important fact in today's world. As President Obama spoke to Muslims and non-Muslims this past June he addressed global issues and building bridges, while making some very interesting points about women's rights:

The sixth issue that I want to address is women's rights. I know... and you can tell from this audience, that there is a healthy debate about this issue. I reject the view in the West that a woman who chooses to cover her hair is somehow less equal, but I do believe that a woman who is denied an education is denied equality... Now let me be clear: Issues of women's equality are by no means simply an issue for Islam... we've seen Muslim-minority countries elect a woman to lead. Meanwhile, the struggle for women's equality continues in many aspects of American life, and in countries around the world.⁵⁹

This speech by the American President shows the importance of women's rights, and also how this is a global issue, not strictly a religious issue. Through this analysis we have clearly seen that

⁵⁹ Barack Obama in "President Obama's Cairo Speech Text: as delivered. Text provided by the White House," USA Today. June 4. 2009. Web Accessed November 10, 2009 <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2009-06-04-Obama-textN.htm>

based on religious texts alone, Muslims address women's rights more than the two elder religions, yet today Muslim countries are under scrutiny from the West about the treatment of women. It is clear this is a social issue, not a religious issue.

Having shared heritage and overlapping ideas in women's rights in at least one aspect, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam need to join together in advocating for women's rights across the globe. As President Obama has said that he is "convinced that our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons,"⁶⁰ the three religions should be understanding of this and be advocates for women's rights. After analyzing all three religious views of women's rights, the West especially needs to step back and understand the differences between Islamic religious views of women's rights, and what Muslim-majority countries have come to see as women's roles in society. With understanding and differences aside, women's rights will be the ultimate champion of all three religions and societies across the globe.

Conclusion

Muslim rights, not just women's rights, is a pertinent issue in Western culture today, specifically in the United States. It is undeniable that Americans have attacked the Islamic faith for being antifeminists and terrorists. Neither of these accusations is true, and needs to be addressed in American society if we truly want to better ourselves. To reach that goal of being a "city upon a hill," or a role model for other western societies, America needs to embrace diversity, not fear it, and not let it stand in the way of basic human rights.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

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