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### The Parasite Among Us

It exploits our fears. It holds us hostage in our own bodies. No drug or antidote is known to reverse its effects, and it's growing like the plague. It strips us of our humanity and pride as Americans and humans. What is it? It is the burning rays of Muslim prejudism recently erupting in masses among us. It exists in the media, and the resounding association of Muslim = terrorist has only elevated this irrational fear. It may seem small today but it will only grow exponentially if not stopped now. To investigate this phenomenon, let's apply the concept of Islamophobia to the Rotary Four-Way test by asking these key questions: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerns? Will this notion build goodwill and better friendships? And will the spread of this toxic poison benefit any person to all concerns? As I applied this test to my daily life and envisioned the halls of schools and streets filled with this parasite, I soon discovered the answer to all those questions is a resounding "NO". Let's further continue this conversation with facts and expertise.

Is this irrational fear the truth? How could someone possibly be terrified of a "normal" person? The answer is nativism with a sprinkle of racist ideologies on top. In fact, anti-immigrant sentiments are arguably rooted in our political culture. Since the Garden of Eve to modern day, no society has been truly isolated, and this the is the case for American societies as well. America has expressed stronger hands pushing away immigrants than embracing them. In the 1800s it was the Irish and Germans. Millions believed that they were destroying the algorithm of the economy and the American way of life by taking over American jobs (Benson).

In fact the voices became so loud that a political party was formed to express the common attitudes of the people. Eventually due to heightened concerns, immigration laws and restrictions were placed (Benson). Next, the Italians; then the Jews; and then the Japanese. And now? It's the Muslims. It has happened before; who is to say that it cannot happen again? Although some who have never experienced the rays of racism puncture their pride claim we cry wolf, but that is not the truth. Take recent political action into consideration. Just last year, the infamous release of the "executive Order 13769 [better known as the Muslim Ban] suspended for 90 days the entry of certain aliens from seven countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen"(National Security and Defense). In President Trump's executive order, these countries proclaimed to be identified as "presenting heightened concerns about terrorism"(National Security and Defense). Terrorism can occur anywhere and anyplace by anyone. Who is to say that limiting only aliens from "Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen" will safeguard us from any acts of terrorism? Yes, these countries have problems. Yes, terrorism exists there. But does it not exist here? Again, terrorism can occur anywhere and anyplace by anyone. Yet immigration of certain people who may have a different skin tone than us or speak a different language than us are prohibited in an allusion to safety. Yet the president of the free world is seen giving a thumbs up to masked nativism. Yes, it is President Trump's right and faithful duty to do all for the safety of the American people, but at what cost? Turning away refugees and families at the risk of 1 sour apple in a pile of millions? But in 17 years, not one of these countries have been the cause for any signs of terrorism within the United States (Clay). So then why are they targeted? Why does the west perceive them as terrorist-produced countries? The reason behind all this madness is the media's perspective of "Islamic terrorism". Extremist

groups, like ISIS, use religion to justify their twisted take on peaceful ideologies of Islam. They misrepresent Islam and its values, giving the western world wrong impressions of what Islam really is. When any American turns on the TV and listens to global news, they always encounter stories of violence, tragedies, and despair which paints their depiction as of total war and misery. And because of this, people often tend to associate terrorism with Muslims. The effects of this ideology is becoming more daunting day by day. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, hate crimes against Muslims and attacks on mosques increased over 63% from 2014 to 2015 (Clay). The seed is then embedded. The parasite acquires hosts, who just happen to be scared individuals, and chips at their humanity until all that is left is hate. The growth of anti-Muslim hate groups has skyrocketed 193% (Clay). They hold up signs which read “Go home Muslim” or “Muslim terrorists not welcome here”. And unknowingly they support nationalist ideologies that Muslims will destroy the “American” way of life if allowed in. All that hate does is hurt the sentiments of average Muslim-Americans like me who also call America home and are also on the frontlines protecting their homes.

Is it fair to all concerns? Is it fair for young boys and girls to be bullied at an age where they should be playing in the sandbox or running around at recess playing tag? Is it fair to isolate them because they pertain to a certain religion? Certainly, the answers to those questions are a resounding “NO”. This fear is exploiting in schools and workplaces. Bullying cases of Muslim youth is increasing day by day. A report released by the American-Islamic Relations Council in 2015 claims, “55% of Muslim American students surveyed in California said they had been bullied because of their religion” (Warth). According to this statistic, every 1 in 2 Muslim-American has been targeted and made felt like an outsider to their homes. If this can be

true for America's heavily populated left-leaning states, imagine the numbers of the right states. Imagine in masses how the silhouette of islamophobia has already daunted millions before they even had the chance to accomplish something for themselves and for their country. No Muslim has been totally isolated from the flames of islamophobia. I myself experienced questionable practices of airport security while traveling. After traveling 12 hours the day before and over many miles, we had one last stop to reach home, the States. Like tired passagers we woke at the break of dawn and rushed to Barcelona International. Like robots we followed the routine. Shoes off. Jackets to the side. And after going through both man and machine, we drowsily walked towards the gate, like any other passenger. Groggily, I remember finding myself looking at two officers dressed in black and white approaching my Mom and I. "I'm sorry to say but you have to come with us", one of them said. Confused, my mom and I just looked at each other. *What could they possibly want from us at 7 in the morning*, I wondered. "The plane will wait for you but you were selected to go through another security checkpoint". And then it hit me. And it hit me a truck. I had heard enough about TSA and their questionable practices among Muslims. But never in my wildest dreams did I think that the same could happen to me one day. As it was not enough that we had been checked with all the other passengers, we needed to go through another one just to satisfy the needs of these people. Sure, this could have happened with anyone else but what is the likelihood of choosing the only family that looked ethnically diverse in the multitude of people from European decent. Nevertheless, we had to comply, which apparently meant going through an extra step just to prove ourselves as "normal citizens". Humiliated, my mom and I walked away from the line and followed the officers, like an accused taking steps to the noose. As we got there I noticed another man was going through the same thing;like us, he also

*coincidentally* happened to be of African-American descent. Again shoes off. Jackets to the side. But this time, security was tighter. Instead of scanning the luggage. We were prompted to open our luggage and leave it under the reigns of another officer, one who would not break eye contact, even to blink. He rampaged through all our clothes, messing the neat folds that had so preciously been put there. Another lady conducted gunpowder tests on our hands and clothes. An extra 15 minutes and around a trillion tests later, they finally reached the conclusion that we were harmless. The fact that they required checking is not what prompted me to believe in Islamophobia. But the fact that TSA racially profiled people from different ethnicities is what pushed me over the edge. So I ask you is it fair that a mother and a daughter were pulled out of line after being thoroughly checked only to be rechecked because they have the same skin tone as the modern day “terrorist”?

Will this notion promote goodwill and better friendships? Absolutely not. When has any fear lead to any goodwill? And Islamophobia is just another form of disguised racism. Instead, if this parasite becomes abundant in our schools and workplaces, the social division between Muslims and everyone else will stand greater than anything else in our country. In political terms, America will stand one House divided. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said regarding hate, “darkness cannot drive out darkness; only love can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that”(King). Goodwill and friendships can only be built through trust and understanding. Before all, hate must be conquered from inside of us first. What America needs is more interactions with Muslims. “57% Americans claim they know little about Islam” (Burke). It is in human nature to assume when certain things are not known. And since 57% of Americans do not even know Islam, 57% of Americans have mixed interpretations of Islam that are a

combination of opinions and inferences. And because it is normal to be afraid of the unknown, interactions are lessened. To combat this problem, mosques must be considered as polling places. Although it is common for churches and synagogues to serve as voting places, mosques are rarely in the equation. Mosques are often seen as places just for Muslims; while this is not true. Just like churches and other Houses of worships, the doors of a mosque are open to people of any kind, rich or poor, new or old, muslim or non-muslim. Stepping inside a mosque and breaking the ice on who Muslims really are. As everyone comes together for a community event, friendships may be formed and smiles may be exchanged, which will greatly decrease the division that is growing rapidly among America.

Will the spread of islamophobia spread goodwill? Absolutely not. If this plague is not stopped soon, thousands of other mothers and daughters will be pushed out of airport lines to be further evaluated on questionable basis. The bullying of millions of children would be justified. And our society will suffer more than anything. Eliminating the fear of Islamophobia will do wonders for our society. The emancipation of slaves gave us brothers who fought with us until their last breaths. The emancipation of Muslims will do the same. The coming together of immigrants and native alike is what made American great. Such unique melting pot of rich cultures and traditions cannot simply be replaced. If this phobia was eliminated, the unity of this nation would make it a force undestructable.

In conclusion, Islamophobia is the harsh truth of the epidemic that is sweeping the nation. Navitist ideologies target Muslims in order to preserve their version of the American life. What nativists do not realize is that muslims have been natives to this country since colonial times. They were the slaves that survived the middle passage, in chains and bondage. (President). They

were the cultivators of indigo and rice. And strong individuals whose faith did not break no matter how many times they were flogged. They were the men who fought among the immortal Washington in the Revolution for this great country (National Museum). We are not the enemy. We are not psychotic lunatics that enjoy seeing blood on our hands. We cry just as hard as you when we hear of tragedies. Know this parasite before it takes root and prevent this division before this country falls apart for what it believes in: for “ freedom and equality for all”.

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