Mediating Prejudice Post-9/11:

Using Advertisements to Counter Anti-Muslim and Other Stereotypes

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

INTRODUCTION

Fear and anxiety permeated the U.S. in the aftermath of 9/11. Because the terrorists trained and planned the attack while living in the U.S., people began to look suspiciously at their neighbors and especially to eye warily those using public transportation. Arab and Muslim-Americans, but also immigrants, people of color, and those wearing religious garb, bore the brunt of the racial profiling embraced both by individuals and the Bush administration’s anti-terror campaign. To counter such biases, not-for-profit and government organizations used advertisements to redefine how people both domestically and abroad imagined Arab and Muslim-Americans.

In this lesson, students will analyze an interview with a Muslim-American conducted as part of Columbia University’s 9/11 Oral History Narrative and Memory Project to understand the hostility that the Arab- and Muslim-American community faced in the aftermath of the attacks. They will then analyze print and video public service announcements created by not-for-profit organizations in an effort to lessen such racial prejudices. As a follow-up exercise, students will identify stereotypes that exist in their own communities and create advertisements to counter them. This activity will heighten students’ sensitivity to prejudices in the recent past and in their current environments. It will also encourage them to use the media to counter such messages, while considering the limits of advertising in combating stereotypes.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the aftermath of 9/11, many Americans believed that freedom and individual liberties needed to take a backseat to national security and personal safety. The Bush administration’s anti-terror campaign, and particularly the Patriot Act of 2001, furthered this notion by broadening the surveillance powers of law enforcement and migration authorities and increasing their abilities to detain and deport potential terrorists. The Bush administration openly relied on racial profiling of those appearing to be Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim when identifying such suspects. Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Americans had become so widespread by 2002 that a national survey conducted by Cornell University found that half of all Americans saw Muslims as “violent, dangerous, and fanatical” and 44 percent supported “some kind of restriction on Arab and Muslim American civil liberties,” including registering one’s place of residence with the government and racial profiling.

Many people compared the general attitude in the U.S. toward Arab and Muslim-Americans post-9/11 to the U.S.’s response to Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor. Some, including a Bush appointee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Peter Kirsanow, even threatened interning Arab-Americans if another terrorist attack occurred in the U.S. Although both the
Commission and the Bush administration refuted this position, Kirsanow’s statement illustrated the depth of anti-Arab sentiment.

To counter such discrimination, several not-for-profit organizations, including the Ad Council, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), initiated advertising campaigns to celebrate the nation’s diversity. The Ad Council’s “I Am an American” public service announcement challenged the idea that all Americans are white, although it did not specifically represent religious minorities. After 9/11, and again after the first and second anniversary of the attack, its message of American diversity was repeatedly broadcast on mainstream channels and met with acclaim from the media and Americans all over the world. Other messages, such as CAIR’s “We’re American Muslims” campaign, were markedly less well circulated because of financial constraints. CAIR’s public service announcements drew specific attention to American Muslims and highlighted those wearing religious garb. CAIR’s ads suggested that regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity, all Americans share a core set of values and principles including a love of freedom, a belief in equality, and respect for diversity. Economic pressures limited the distribution of these ads, which were printed a total of six times in the New York Times in addition to their display in local newspapers and on CAIR’s website.

These public service announcements circulated new positive images of Arab and Muslim Americans. Although they did not stop hate crimes against Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians or radically alter the opinions held by most Americans, they did help to create a new, more inclusive and pluralistic language regarding American identity.

**THEMES**: racial discrimination, civil rights, social justice, production of knowledge

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Following this activity, students will be able to:

1. Describe the rise of anti-Arab, Muslim, and immigrant sentiment after 9/11
2. Understand the ways in which not-for-profit organizations used the media to counter such discrimination
3. Comprehend the continued existence of prejudices in their own communities and what they can do to resist them.
4. Compare the strengths and weaknesses of advertising in creating cultural change.

**NEW JERSEY STANDARDS**

STANDARD 6.1.4. D.16 (History, Culture, and Perspectives): Describe how stereotyping and prejudice can lead to conflict, using examples from the past and present.

STANDARD 6.1.12.D.14.e (History, Culture, and Perspectives) Evaluate the role of religion on cultural and social mores, public opinion, and political decisions.
MATERIALS

- A computer with Internet access
- Appendix F: Discussion questions

DETAILS OF ACTIVITY

Part I: The Rise of Anti-Arab and Muslim Sentiment (15 min.):

Explain to the class that Al Qaeda terrorists’ efforts to destroy the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the White House succeeded in terrifying many Americans. All of a sudden, Americans looked differently at their neighbors as well as those sitting next to them on planes and trains. They especially feared and were hostile toward Arab and Muslim Americans, but since they weren’t sure what Arab and Muslim Americans looked like, they also targeted immigrants, people of color, and those wearing religious garb.

To get a sense of how this attitude affected minorities in the U.S., have students go around the room, each reading a paragraph of an excerpt from Gerry Albarelli’s 2001 interview with Salmaan Jaffery, a naturalized U.S. citizen living in New York who is also a moderate Muslim of Middle Eastern descent (Appendix A). In this interview, collected as part of the 9/11 Oral History Narrative and Memory Project by Columbia University’s Oral History Office, Jaffery describes the type of discrimination he and other Americans of Middle Eastern background faced in the aftermath of 9/11.

Ask the students the following questions, and write their answers on the board:

- How did 9/11 change Jaffery's life?
- Does anything in this interview surprise you?
- What does Jaffery mean when he says "Muslims have lost a P.R. [public relations] battle?"
- What might Arab Americans do to change American perspectives toward them?

Part II: Using the Media to Combat Racism (10 min.)

Tell the students that they are now going to look at a public relations campaign led by two not-for-profit groups, the Ad Council and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) to
counter anti-Arab and Muslim sentiment. The Ad Council’s campaign was called “I am an American” and CAIR’s was named “I am an American Muslim.”

Tell students that for the remainder of the class they are going to analyze ads created by these companies and use their insights into such techniques to change the ways that Americans thought about Muslim and other minorities in America. Tell them that they should pay extra attention to the strategies used in these ads because as a follow-up exercise they will be creating advertisements to address prejudices and stereotypes in their own communities.

Watch the Ad Council’s video “I Am an American” (Appendix B). Ask students the following and write their answers on the board:

- What is the ad’s central message?
- What audience do you think the ad targets and why?
- How does the ad represent minorities in the U.S.? For example, which minorities does it include and exclude? Do the pictured people wear obvious religious symbols, engage in religious behaviors, or interact with visibly religious institutions?
- According to this ad, what does it mean to be American? What do Americans do (i.e. how do they serve the nation thru military service, working for the government, girl scouts, heterosexual marriage, being parents, etc.)? Does the ad include overt signs of American patriotism (flags, military uniforms, etc.)?
- How persuasive is the ad? Do you think it might change the mind of someone who was prejudiced against Muslim Americans?

Part III: Analyzing CAIR’s Anti-Muslim Advertising Campaign (20 min.)

Divide the class into groups and give them one of three advertisements created by CAIR (Appendices C thru E). Have each group discuss the comparative strategies and techniques used by CAIR’s campaign (See Appendix F for questions to guide group discussions).

Have groups report their conclusions asking different groups to answer different questions.

WRAP-UP DISCUSSION (5 min.)

How successful do you think the media (the newspaper, TV news, radio, advertisements, photographs, political cartoons etc) are in changing people’s opinions? What other ways are there to persuade people to think differently (education, changes in political policies, etc.)? How does an advertising campaign compare to these other strategies?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Think of a group in your community that has faced stereotypes or prejudice (this could be racial, ethnic, religious, but could also be a formal or informal school group -- kids in the chorus, kids who are overweight, kids who don't wear designer clothing etc.). Using the techniques you learned in class, create an ad to counter stereotypes about this group. Write a short explanation of your ad describing the audience you sought to target and the approaches you used to try to
persuade them. How successful do you think your ad would be at changing viewers’ attitudes toward the group you selected? How powerful is the media in shaping public perceptions? How else might you want to combat the prejudice and stereotyping that your ad addressed?

REFERENCES and WEBSITES:


“I am American,” televised commercial created by the Ad Council, 2001 to present (60 seconds), available online at: http://www.adcouncil.org/default.aspx?id=141.


Q: So how has this affected your life? I mean, how has your life changed, if it has changed, since September 11th?

S. Jaffery: First and foremost, I lost my job. I mean, my job went away because the Winter Garden and the annex building were damaged. ..My job moved to New Jersey, and then they don't have the budget. So that was in a very real way.

Too, just, I think, emotionally -- I think everyone around us, we were all affected, and we all talked about it for a good two months afterwards. I mean, the first five, six days was literally non-stop CNN watching, around the clock, this obsession with why, what, where information. Not much reflection, not much digestion of the information, but just information. I think that the Sunday following was the first time it really hit me, and a sense of despair just came over me.

But then something else happened afterwards, which was even more disturbing, because even beyond the day-to-day sorrow and the death and the trauma, things that affect who you are as a person are very powerful. So this whole question about who is responsible. What does it mean to be a Muslim? What does it mean to be a Pakistani Muslim? What does it mean to be an American Muslim? Why are Muslims doing this? Are Muslims doing this? The terrorists were Muslim. I happen to be someone who was very soul-searching to begin with. I also know a lot about our history, and I'm a keen, keen follower of foreign policy in the Middle East. I've been active, I've written, I've read. So this was a very, very big question for me, and that still lingers. It's continued from that day until today. So now, there's a whole new phase of: What is my role as a U.S. citizen who happens to be Muslim? Are my values just? Can I justify the actions of people? Do I actually defend myself when people attack Muslims or the Middle East? How do I feel about where I'm from, et cetera, et cetera.

The first couple of weeks, I did not leave my neighborhood. I was afraid...I wasn't afraid I'd be attacked. I was afraid I'd face someone who was belligerent, who I could not counter because it was such a moment of national grief. So I kept a very low profile, and, plus, there were killings in Texas and Phoenix. A Sikh guy got killed in Phoenix; a Pakistani was killed in Houston. A couple of friends got harassed.

Secondly, for the month and a half afterwards, I shaved every day. Whenever I went out, I'd keep a very close shave, which I hate shaving and I do have a pretty thick beard. I took no chances. I'm even ashamed to admit this -- no, actually, I'm not ashamed. I was ashamed for a bit -- for a week or two, I dressed as quote-unquote, "Yankee" as I could, like I didn't wear that black leather jacket or black jeans or black shoes. I wore shorts, my vest, my baseball cap, because I just didn't want to stand out too much.
Q: What happened to your friends who were harassed?

S. Jaffery: They are family friends who -- the husband works for the United Nations. They live in the Waterside Towers. The wife and the daughter were walking along Lexington [Avenue] or something, and someone drove by and said -- we don't know the specifics -- they said something about them being Arabs and them going home or, "Look at what you did," something like that. The other thing I did is, I spoke to so many cab drivers -- I talk to cab drivers a lot, I just enjoy hearing what they're hearing. The majority tend to be Pakistani or non-white American. This one cab driver, who was Egyptian, had his tires slashed. This one Pakistani said he had some people yell at him but nothing violent.

I had been reading very vigorously before 9/11, by the way. It's so weird because I had been reading books about Islam. I was pissed off at us. Muslims have lost a P.R. [public relations] battle. We have given in to fundamentalism. We don't look at all the great sort of non practicing things in our religion. Unfortunately, we have become a religion that people associate with violence, and it's not.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, two advertisement agency executives, who were concerned about rising anti-immigrant and particularly anti-Arab sentiment, created this public service announcement that celebrates American diversity. They brought it to the Ad Council, a private, non-profit organization that promotes messages intended to affect positive social change. The campaign met with acclaim from the media and Americans all over the world.

WE’RE AMERICANS AND WE’RE MUSLIMS

On my honor, I will try:
To serve God and my country.
And to help people at all times.

The members of Santa Clara Muslim Girl Scout Troop #856 have made a pledge to serve their community, their country and God. The American values that we all cherish—like service, charity and tolerance—are the same values that Muslims are taught to uphold in daily life.

Muslim life and worship are structured around the Five Pillars of Islam—faith, prayer, helping the needy, fasting, and pilgrimage. The third pillar teaches that all things belong to God and are only held in trust by humans, so as Muslims we are expected to share a percentage of our wealth every year to help the poor.

Devotion to God and the teachings of Islam strengthen our commitment to community and country. Like Americans of all faiths, we use the principles of our religion to guide us in an ever-changing world, and we teach our children to respect the values that make our country a secure place for all Americans.

WE’RE AMERICAN MUSLIMS

Number two of fifty-two in the Islam in America series. To learn more about the series, visit www.americansmuslims.info
WE’RE AMERICAN AND WE’RE MUSLIMS

MY NAME IS AMINAH KAPADIA, and I’m a wife, a mom and a student. I’m studying for a Masters degree in education, and I volunteer at our children’s school, where I’m also active in the PTA. I was born in Philadelphia, to Puerto Rican parents, and have lived in the United States my entire life. My husband, Zubin, is from India, but has called America home for more than thirty years. He’s an attorney and former economic officer for the U.S. Department of State. Now he spends his time running a consulting firm and coaching our sons’ T-ball and soccer teams.

Like many Americans, my husband and I face the challenge of raising our children in an unpredictable world. That’s why the basic principles of our religion, like tolerance, justice and devotion to family, are a central part of our lives. As the Prophet Muhammad told us, “The best of you is he who is best to his family. None of you will have faith until he wants for his brother what he wishes for himself.”

We believe the security of our nation is dependent upon the strength of our families, and Islam teaches us the values that provide that strength.

WE’RE AMERICAN MUSLIMS
Appendix F: Discussion Questions

1. What is the ad’s central message? How does it compare to the central message of the Ad Council’s “I Am an American” public service announcement? Does it target the same audience?

2. How does CAIR represent minorities in the US? How does CAIR’s representation of minorities compare to the Ad Council’s?

3. Which minorities did they include and exclude in this ad? Did they picture people wearing noticeable religious symbols, engaging in noticeably religious behaviors, or located in religious institutions?

4. According to this ad, what does it mean to be American? How does CAIR’s representation of Americans/a compare to the Ad Council’s?

5. What do Americans do (i.e. how do they serve the nation, thru military service, working for the government, girl scouts, heterosexual marriage, being parents, working for the government, etc.)? Does the ad include overt signs of American patriotism (flags, military uniforms, etc.)?

6. Which ad do you think is more persuasive? Do you think either of them might change the mind of someone who was prejudiced against Muslim Americans?