

I am saddened and confused by the American media's role in stoking the flames of xenophobia. I wanted to learn the basis of these fears, and how they control us and our environments. Not only did I focus on Americans' fear of foreigners, I also developed extensive research on the process by which human beings develop fear. The topic of fear is tricky and the knowledge humans have on fear is limited.

For my art, I decided to take a step back and examine my own fears from a distance. I wanted my love of photography to capture the essence of my unease. Something I've struggled with is my appearance, so I decided to push myself outside my comfort zone and take self-portraits to overcome a fear of my image by celebrating it rather than shying away. I photographed six different fears, dedicating three photos to each. Rather than label the photographs with the fears I metaphorically represent, I have left them untitled so the viewer can experience their own emotions without any prior assumptions. I also wanted the viewer to have a personal experience, which is why I created a small hardback book. I hope my photographs encourage emotion and give people the opportunity to consider what their own fears may be, and how they can be addressed.

Grace

Xenophobia

[zen-uh-foh-bee-uh]

Noun

1. An unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers or of that that is foreign or strange

Turning on the TV to see flashes of horror. Scrolling through the Internet to see constant images depicting gun shootings or terrorism. The devastating ends to news articles. Growing up, I was very fortunate to travel often and I soon learned that media depictions were not always true. The biggest realization for me was the summer of 2015, when I traveled to Russia. While the media hadn't been highlighting Russia at that point in time, I had preconceived impressions of the country. I remember watching *James Bond* movies and hearing stories of the Cold war. I imagined it to be dark and cold. I pictured mean drunks and feeling unsafe. The three days my dad and I spent there were shocking. The streets were filled with happy people, store windows displayed bright colors, and people were extremely welcoming. While I was only visiting for three days and never left Moscow, I was dumbfounded by how I had misconceived the country, but grateful my impression changed due to my experience. I realized I shouldn't judge a country by only hearing what Americans had to say about it. Traveling develops a greater understanding for other cultures, but how the media depicts other cultures can affect people's opinions. I soon found my views of other cultures were similar to other Americans. I soon found my ideas of how Americans treat foreigners were being reflected by social media. A trending picture on the Internet recently displays a smiling man wearing a turban about to go through security at an American airport. The photo is captioned, "about to be randomly selected." The photo quickly went viral as people found it hilarious, and while being funny it is also sad. It's sad that he's right. Since 9/11, Muslims have been treated differently in American society, especially in airports. Xenophobia is so prevalent we have begun to joke about it. Jokes, while light hearted and funny, will not fix xenophobia. Why do we feel the need to stereotype? Are we that afraid of foreigners?

Xenophobia, the fear of foreigners, has been prevalent in American society for centuries. The act of xenophobia in America all started when Europe colonized America. When Europeans found America to already be home to over 50 million Native Americans, they initiated a cultural genocide, reducing their population by 95% (Head). African Americans were brought here in chains in 1808, but even in post-slavery they were still treated with the same prejudices and stereotypes from before (Head). In 1840, when Chinese started migrating to help build the railroads Americans began to fear the growing ethnicity rate of 110,000 Chinese immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 stated Chinese immigrants "endanger the good order of certain localities and would no longer be tolerated" quickly outcast Chinese Americans. Bizarre laws such as California's tax on hiring Chinese American workers, or the violence that broke out like the 1887 Oregon's Chinese Massacre continued the trend (Head). Americans' fear and the necessity to "other" (to view or treat a person as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself) continued, as German Americans were outcast during both World Wars. During World War I, some states made it illegal to speak German and during World War II 11,000 German Americans were detained without trial (Head). Italian Americans were also treated unfairly during World War II, but the immigrants who were treated the worst during this time were the Japanese Americans. 127,000 Japanese American were detained in internment camps for no reason except for their ancestry. The California Alien Law in 1913 made sure Japanese Americans were outcast

by even prohibiting land ownership. Throughout America's history, xenophobia has been prevalent and it continues to be in today's society as we outcast Hispanics, Muslims, and simply any culture different from western ideals (Head). Does today's access to Internet and television drive a new form of fear of strangers because humans have access to more information? The media uses its power of communication to influence xenophobia into American society.

News is the main machine for perpetrating American xenophobia. With more than 50 national broadcasting networks, the American population is easily reached by television. The media's goal is to get more viewers and higher ratings. Studies have shown negative superlatives work 30% better at getting people's attention than positive ones (Wood). Katja M. Flückiger, a Swiss and Dutch national with a license in International Relations specializing in Political Science at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, states, "... in public discourse, immigration issues are discussed solely in terms of threats, crime, and alleged abuse of the welfare system". She believes the media isn't representing other cultures fairly (Flückiger 2). News reporters will also be inadequate with the knowledge to give a proper report. For example, in recent news, media has been confusing the term Arab with Muslim. Arab is a nationality while Islam is a religion. This misconception has created stereotypes and unfair grouping of people from other cultures. Another example is the news highlighting images of 'threatening young males' and rarely displaying images of foreign children and women. Once again, this represents the issue of the public only being shown one side of the story. Muslims still face harsh treatment 14 years after 9/11. "September 11 was a major rude awakening. All of a sudden our religion was hijacked by someone who flies into buildings," said Mohamed El Filali, the outreach coordinator for the Islamic Center of Passaic County in Paterson New Jersey. The news broadcasting channels didn't make it any easier for the Muslim culture as they cultivated the idea that all Muslims are the same (Wood, n.pg). Not only is xenophobia rampant in the news, but also it is subtly fed to us from a young age in American movies and television shows.

Western television shows and movies sometimes create inadequate stereotypes when representing other cultures. Even at a young age, we begin receiving messages about race in movies and television shows. For example, in Disney's 1953 animation *Peter Pan*, not only were "injun" stereotypically whooping and dancing in front of a teepee, they have an entire song about "what makes the red man red." In *Power Rangers*, the Black Ranger was a black guy, the yellow ranger an Asian woman, The Red Ranger was Native American, The Pink Ranger was a ditzy blonde and the blue Ranger was the white guy who had the best skills. Famous movies such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* portray racism when an Asian Man, Mr. Yunioshi, is depicted as a stereotypical caricature of a Japanese man. Mr. Yunioshi wears glasses, a mouthpiece that makes his teeth bigger and prosthetic make-up. Both the director and Mickey Rooney, the actor who portrayed Mr. Yunioshi, have, in later years, responded to the criticism, wishing they had excluded the controversial component of the movie. Another movie that received great reviews but had hints of xenophobia was *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. The movie tried shooting in North India and was denied after officials found the way that Indians were being depicted was offensive. The major issue of the film was the depiction of Kali, their God, who is the God of energy, but was depicted, as the evil god of the underworld where worshippers ripped out people's hearts. While the change was made to suit the narrative of the movie, it was an extreme change that offended the Indian culture. In the movie, Indians were depicted as menacing savages who eat monkey brains, snakes and beetles; none of these accusations are true (Kanyoro). Hints of xenophobia and racism are throughout several American movies and television shows. Are Americans subconsciously developing xenophobia from a young age?

We've grown up getting these hints to fear foreigners, but some people feel so strongly about it they take it into their own hands to create hate sites and hate radio broadcasts outwardly displaying their anger towards foreigners.

The response Americans have towards Xenophobia, have created a growth in hate sites and hate radio stations. From 2009 to 2010, there was a 20% increase in hate sites on the Internet (Oleson). In 2010, it was estimated there were about 11,500 different hate sites and rising. 400-2000 of those is on Xenophobia. Games such as Border Patrol, a game where the users' objective is to shoot Mexican stereotypes at the border, have begun to rise in popularity. Along with other games such as one where the objective is to bomb victims of the 2010 Haiti earthquake (Oleson). What good do these hate sites do? Not only are hate sites gaining in popularity, but also hate radio stations.

Angry Americans use shortwave radio, an inexpensive way to broadcast anywhere in the world, to broadcast their hate. In the United States, there are 21 legal non-governmental stations and 1 illegal non-government stations. Due to freedom of speech, these stations have the right to broadcast degrading, inhuman talks, using inappropriate slander; people all over the world are being reached by these discussions. An extreme example of a consequence from hate radio was Radio Des Mille Collines. This Rwanda radio station was supposedly the cause of the Rwandan genocide. The radio station was set up and financed by Hutu extremists to prepare the people of Rwanda for genocide by demonizing and encouraging hate and violence (Latham). It has become obvious that xenophobia is an issue, enough that people take it into their own hands to create hate. What are we as an American society doing to stop this epidemic?

Xenophobia is a worldwide issue, other countries are deciding to do something about it, but is America? In 1995, The International Federation of Jurists (IFJ), created IRMAX, an International working group against racism and xenophobia. IRMAX hosts several conferences throughout the years to raise awareness and find a solution to the problem. The group has had much success in Russia with handouts, training seminars, training for journalists, and minority groups. IRMAX has also been successful in African and European countries, with the European Union Commissioner, Franco Frattini, proposing to the rest of The EU to establish a code of conduct for media organization to counter "the false attribution for certain values and practices of Islam." In April 2006, the British Council Austria and International Organization launched "Recourse Pack for Journalists Reporting on Migration" for Migration. The "pack" is an online tool that, "offers media experts access to a large network of journalists and organizations, a glossary on migration related topics, tips for appropriate use of images, tips for the sensitive use of language, [and] a collection of useful links." (Flückiger). America has a reputation of being a melting pot. Americans create pressures on foreigners until they loose their own culture and become just like the typical American through the process of cultural assimilation. This issue of is clear in American culture, but not many efforts towards change are visible. If Americans did want to take the step to ridding the country of Xenophobia, what steps could be taken?

Xenophobia created in the media is an issue the American society suffers with, so what steps can be taken to solve this issue? A place to start would be countering hate sites and radio stations with peace sites and peace broadcasts. Emphasizing peace unites people together internationally. Another way to stop the adverse effects of xenophobia is by teaching about stereotypes and xenophobia in schools. It should be taught that there is one human race. History textbooks should be rewritten as to not portray one ethnicity as being higher than others. Students will learn at an early age the damage is depicting stereotypes and be less inclined to form xenophobia. Step three is to stop oppressing minorities' voices. Media is only focusing on

one side of the story and leaving out pieces of the story. Minority organizations should also be given funding, along with minority journalists given more of a chance at entering mainstream journaling. Finally, media councils should deal with xenophobia, racism and stereotyping by setting up an international code of conduct (Flückiger). With everyone working together to create order within media, the creation of xenophobia will soon weaken.

As stated, western media's propagation of Xenophobic themes is a serious issue in society. Realizing the mass media's role is important because Americans have a right to knowledge, which is being subtly denied. Controlling westerners and their opinions generates wealth and power for already very powerful interests. Though what happens when there is no other social group to "other"? Once there is no individuality in American culture and we do not all share a common enemy, what happens? The outcomes, sadly, will not be pleasant. Therefore if Americans can take the steps to make a world where we can progress together, be ONE human race, overcome our fears of foreigners, we will be one step closer to a better home.

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