

SUAD JOSEPH LAB: Media Project
Representing Muslims and Islam in the New York Times: 1850 – 2016.

Sticks and stones: constructing a narrative for the middle east using ethnic and religious terminology in the New York Times.

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My research examines the representation of middle eastern ethnic and religious identities in western print media via the New York Times. Analyzing the changing uses of terminology in media and the way it constructs a broader narrative is essential to understanding both the historical and present perceptions of people, places, and events. The rhetoric in which news events are presented, and the content of a narrative can evoke moral judgements. I analyze the way in which ethnic and religious terminology was used over a 10-year period, 1900-1909. This paper addresses the following questions: was a particular term portrayed positively or negatively? Did the portrayal change over time? Was the terminology used to produce narratives such as “us” versus “them”, the “west” versus the “east”, or the “other” versus the “same”? I consider how these narratives were used to justify certain actions. During the decade of 1900-1909 C.E. the NYT provides accounts of western colonial expansion in Africa, Asia, and the middle east. I argue that the depiction of selected ethnic and religious identities reflected and reinforced both American and European (specifically, British and French) culture, and economic and political interests of the time in which the west is seen as a facilitator of civilization. In the articles, a variety of “authorities” are invoked in order to justify imperialist and orientalist sentiment including academics (archaeologists, linguists, philologists, anthropologists, biblical and religious scholars, etc.), wartime correspondents and in-the-field personnel, and religious figures (reverends and pastors). While a number of publications analyze the portrayal of middle easterners in contemporary media, there has yet to be a comprehensive study of the New York Times. The content of this paper presents a small portion of the results of an ongoing, comprehensive project covering the New York Times, from 1850-the present.