



**Ain Shams University
Faculty of Women
for Arts, Science and Education**

**Racial Manifestations in the Aftermath of 9/11 and during
Obama's Regime in the United States of America as
represented in: Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat*, Ayad
Akhtar's *Disgraced*, David Mamet's *Race* and Bruce
Norris's *Clybourne Park***

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Abstract

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Introduction

Introduction

Racism has always been a part of the human condition worldwide. Although most nations have signed the United Nations' declarations of human rights and claim to apply democracies, racial practices are still manifested in most countries around the world. Although the victims of racism have different cultures and races, the racial experiences of violence, oppression and discrimination are almost similar. The classic interpretation of racism refers to racism as prejudice and discrimination based on the belief that some races are intellectually, culturally, and/or biologically superior to the other races. Thus, the main aim of racism is to categorize people in order to rationalize their oppression and exploitation. Today, contemporary racism is rationalized by various racial manifestations and attitudes which have changed over centuries taking new forms but the racial ideology remained the same.

This contradiction between the assumption of human equality and racial difference has motivated many scholars to rationalize racism through adopting different perspectives to define the meaning of race. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, enlightenment scientists had defined racism and race from a biological perspective giving race a biological meaning. Then this perspective began to change, so many scholars adopted cultural and social interpretations of the meaning of race in order to justify racism (Omi and Winant 4).

Historically, racism has always been a major constituent of Western ideology which believes in the superiority of Whites over other races. However, the main aim of racism has always been categorizing people in order to create a racial hierarchy to emphasize white supremacy over other races and consequently maintain Whites political and economic power. This racial ideology helped to maintain racial systems of slavery, colonialism and imperialism. As Western colonialism and

slavery expanded, the concept of racism was used to magnify the inferiority of non-white races in order to justify exploitation, domination, and violence against non-white people. However, the American version of racism has always remained the most debated example in the modern history.

Although the United States is relatively a young country, yet much of its history is full of racial oppression, slavery and segregation against non-white minorities. Although the United States has promoted itself as the country of freedom and justice which welcomes immigrants worldwide, yet the racial hierarchical structure has always aimed to empower Whites and preserve their interests and privileges. Over almost four centuries, African Americans and other people of color were subjected to oppression, exploitation and various racial manifestations which are evident through the long history of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the Ku Klux Klan racism. Whites have always controlled the American economic and political system in the United States. After the Civil rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s, overt racism in the United States has begun gradually to decline on the official level. However, the racist ideology remained to dominate the American society, a fact which was apparently evident in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks and after the election of Barack Obama, the first black president in the United States. After these two major events in the American history, racism began to be manifested in new forms against Muslims and Blacks.

This thesis focuses on racism manifested in the United states after 9/11 attacks and during the regime of Barack Obama because they are considered to be two significant turning points in the contemporary American history. They were followed by waves of racial discriminatory actions and practices against Muslim- Americans and African -Americans which prove that the American racial heritage is embedded into the structure of American society and institutions.

Thus, 9/11 attacks in 2001 resulted in exaggerated feelings of hatred towards Muslims and Middle Eastern immigrants because they were considered as terrorists. Muslims became targets of racial discrimination and violence which were accompanied by the American 'War on terror'. On the other hand, the election of Obama in 2008, brought at first a new hope that the United States started a post-racial era so Blacks can get their full rights as American citizens. However, the ugly truth was that racial discrimination against African Americans remained the same and became even worse. Many African Americans were disappointed over Obama's policies which failed to bring any racial change to Blacks. In fact, racial manifestations against Muslim -Americans and African -Americans have proved that attaining racial justice in the United States is just an illusion.

Hence, the main objectives of the thesis are first to examine how racism is socially constructed in the fabric of the American society against all non-white minorities particularly Muslim Americans and African Americans. The second objective is to highlight the increase of racist practices against Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 and to prove that Islamophobia is a kind of racism. Finally, the third objective is to examine racism against Blacks after the election of President Obama which is still manifested in the different fields of life.

In order to expose racial manifestations against Muslim -Americans and African- Americans, the researcher analyzes four contemporary American plays. The first two plays discuss racial manifestations against Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11, namely *Back of the Throat* (2005) written by the Egyptian -American writer Yussef El Guindi (1960-) and *Disgraced* (2012) written by the Pakistani American writer Ayad Akhtar (1970-).

The second set of plays are *Race* (2009) by David Mamet (1947-) and *Clybourne Park* (2010) by Bruce Norris (1960-). Both plays, written by white American writers, expose racism against African Americans after the election of Barack Obama.

The thesis discusses how the four writers managed to present their own views of racism that is manifested against Muslims and Blacks, based upon their own reading of the daily interactions between white and non-white Americans emphasizing the fact that all racial groups in the United States are influenced by various degrees of racism. They emphasize the role of negative stereotyping of Muslims and Blacks which has always paved the way for more racial practices such as denial of citizenship rights, hate crimes against Muslims and socio-economic discrimination and hatred against African Americans.

The theoretical framework applied on the plays, is based on three contemporary American theories about racism which deal with racism from a social perspective and as a part of political and ideological conflicts in the United States. The researcher has selected these three theories because they are complementary to each other, providing a comprehensive view and explaining the racial manifestations against Muslim Americans and African Americans. These theories highlight that race and racism have always been at the center of the American experience and have always been subjected to change according to the present political environment.

The first theory is about systemic racism in the United States by Joe R. Feagin (1938-) which is included in his book; *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (2006). Through this book, Feagin illustrates that racism is systemic in the United States and structured into the rhythm of everyday life of all people of color and minorities in the United States. Feagin also explains how racism in the United States encompasses a structured set of stereotypes, ideologies and

practices to oppress people of color and maintain the privileges of Whites.

The second theory is the theory of racial formation in the United States by Michael Omi's and Howard Winant (1946-) which is illustrated through their book *Racial Formation in the United States* (2015). The racial formation theory has contributed greatly to understand the role of race in the United States. Through this book they demonstrate how race is socially constructed and how the interpretation of racism is connected to social, economic, and political forces which govern the way in which racial categories and hierarchies are formed emphasizing the flexibility of racial meanings in the United States.

The third theory is by Erik Love who relies on Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1979). Erik Love connects in his book *Islamophobia and Racism in America* (2017), the misrepresentation of Middle Easterners with a parallel history of discrimination in the United States. This racial discrimination has increased dramatically in the aftermath of 9/11 because of the racialization of Muslims. Therefore, he proves through his book how Islamophobia is considered to be a kind of racism. He believes that in America everyone is profiled with a racial identity which determines his position in the American society.

By applying the selected theories and through the analysis of the selected plays, the thesis examines different racial manifestations against Muslim-Americans and African-Americans. Therefore, the study raises the following questions: How far is racism directed against all minorities in the United States with special reference to Muslim-Americans and African -Americans? Is racism socially constructed and systemic in the United States? How far did the 9/11 events increase discrimination against Muslims in what is known as Islamophobia? What are the conditions of African-Americans

after the election of President Obama 'the first black American president? How the relationship between Blacks and Whites in the post- racial era is still governed by mutual hatred and motivated by colorblind ideology and reverse racism?

This thesis is divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, " Racism in the United States: A Survey" presents a review of racism and a survey of the theories related to racism with special reference to Joe R. Feagin's, Erik Love's Michael Omi's and Howard Winant's theories of racism in the United States. The first part of Chapter one is the introduction, where different definitions of racism and race are given to explain how racism and race were viewed from biological perspective then theorists began to study it from a social perspective. Moreover, it explains how concepts of race, white supremacy and racial framing aimed at preserving racial hierarchy to empower white Americans to justify slavery, colonialism and imperialism as well as to defend their privileges. The second part presents a brief background to racism in the United States with special reference to racism manifested against Muslim Americans before and after 9/11and the long history of racism against African Americans even after the election of the first African American president.

Chapter two, "Racial Manifestations against Muslim-Americans in the Aftermath of 9/11 as represented in Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* and Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*" discusses the prevalence of Islamophobia in the aftermath of 9/11 which makes Muslims in the United States subjected to racism. Thus, although the protagonists of the two plays respond differently to Islamophobia, they are subjected to various manifestations of racism because of their racial identity.

Chapter two is divided into two parts. The first part is dedicated to provide a brief biography of the two playwrights,

Yussef El Guindi and Ayad Akhtar, placing them within their contemporaries. Moreover, this part illustrates how the two writers employ their dramatic works to reflect racial discrimination against Arab Americans and South-Asians Americans who live in the United States. This is followed by a brief background of the two discussed plays as they represent Arab and South-Asian theatre in the United States, proving that they share the same painful experience of the racially targeted minorities particularly in the aftermath of 9/11. The second section analyzes how racism against Muslims in the United States in the aftermath of 9/11 is represented through, *Back of the Throat* and *Disgraced*. The analysis is based on tracing various racial manifestations exercised by the Americans against Muslim Americans. These racial manifestations range from racial framing (stereotyping), denial of Muslims rights as American citizens and finally hate crimes, which include verbal and physical violence, under the banner of 'War on Terror'.

Chapter three, "Racial Manifestations against Black Americans during Obama's Regime as represented in David Mamet's *Race* and Bruce Norris' *Clybourne Park*, depicts racism against African Americans during the regime of Barack Obama. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines how white American playwrights and producers present racism on stage. This is illustrated through drawing a comparison between staging racism before and after Obama's presidency. This is followed by an account of the two white playwrights David Mamet and Bruce Norris highlighting their contributions to the American drama and placing them within their contemporaries. In fact, many Americans have argued that Obama's presidency has marked the end of the long racial history of the United States. Yet the two plays indicate the continuity of racism in Obama's presidential regime. These manifestations vary from racial stereotyping, socio-economic discrimination and the racial

relationship between Blacks and Whites which is governed by mutual hatred driving Blacks to be as racists as Whites.

The conclusion sums up the findings of the thesis, showing different perspectives of racism in the United States particularly against Muslim Americans and African Americans in the aftermath of 9/11 and during Obama's regime throughout the selected plays. It illustrates how the research questions which have been raised, have been answered through the analysis of the four selected plays.

Chapter One
Racism in the United States:
A Survey