



Sustainability of Immigration Policies and Politics: The Case of Turks in the United States

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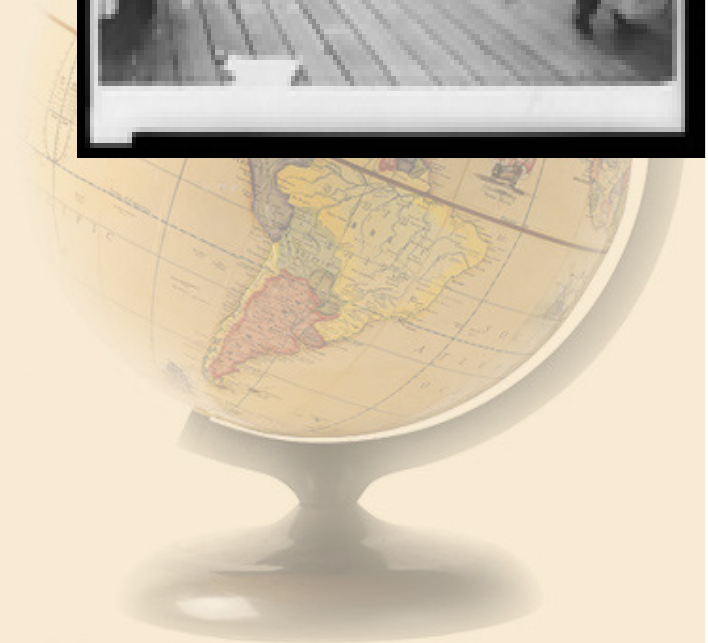
Turkish Immigration

- 450,539 Immigrants came from Turkey since 1820 (INS)
- 117619 Turkish Americans (US Census-2000)
- About 3,500 immigrants every year
- Approximately 300,000-500,000 Turks in America

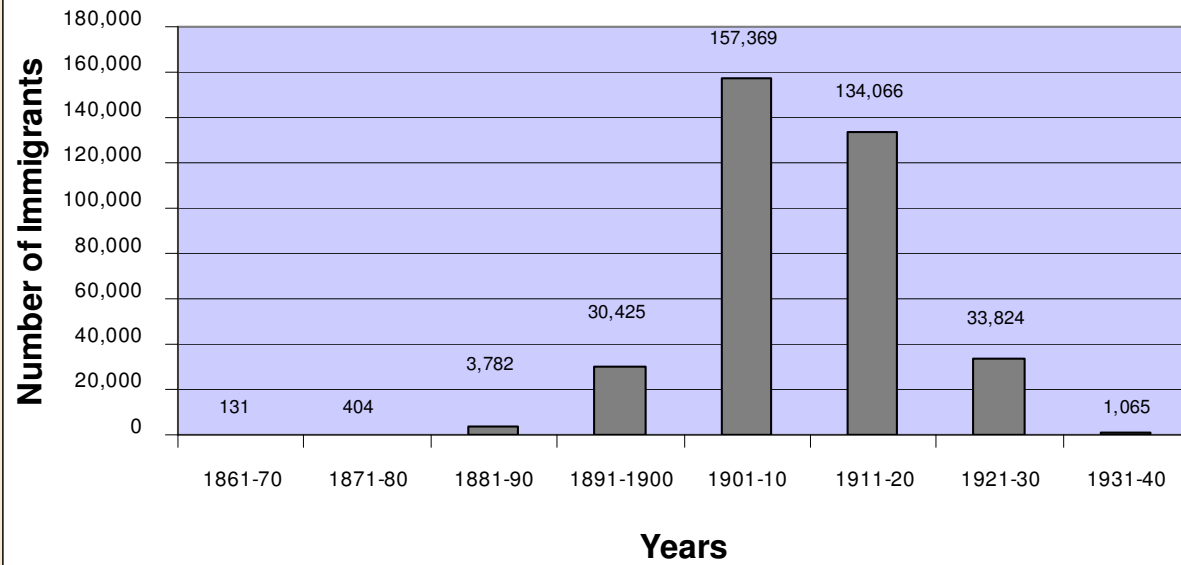


Three waves of Immigration

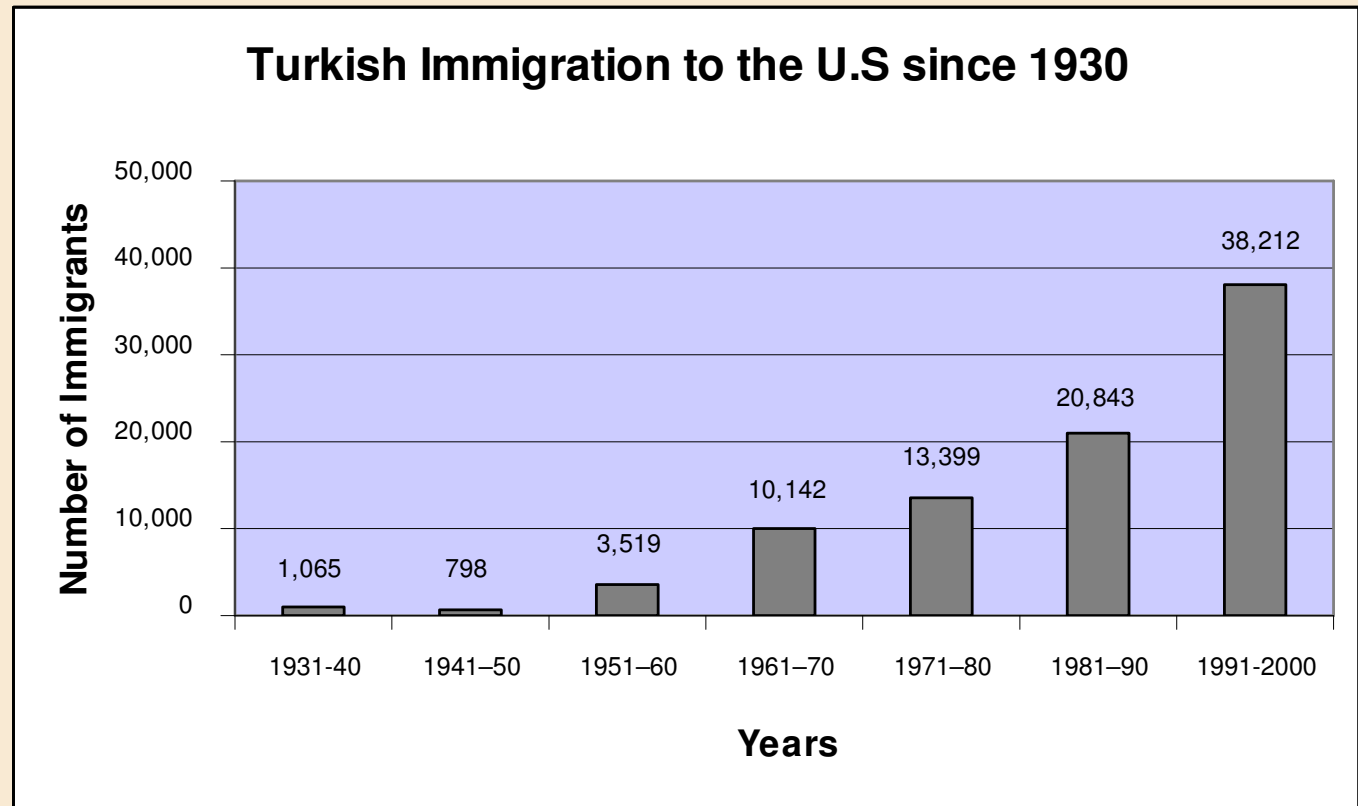
- First Wave: Peasants
 - Late 1800s - end of WWI)
- Second: Professionals
 - Wave After WW II
- Third Wave: Mixed Group
 - After 1980s



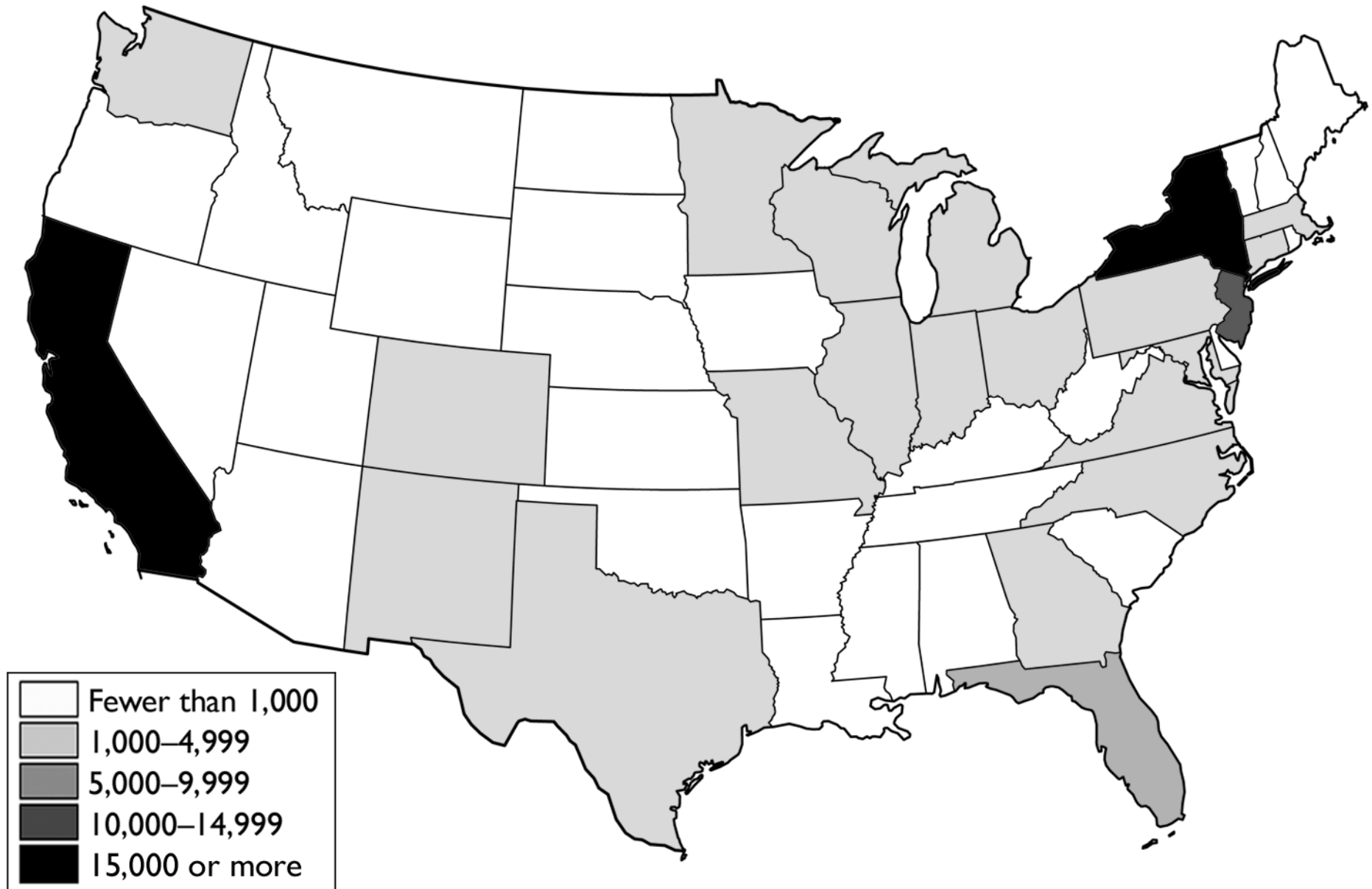
Turkish Immigration to the U.S before WWII



Turkish-American Educational Attainment (Persons 25 years and over)		
High school graduate or higher	81.4	36,529
Bachelor's degree or higher	40.9	18,352
Graduate degree or higher	22.1	9,923
Total	100	44,872

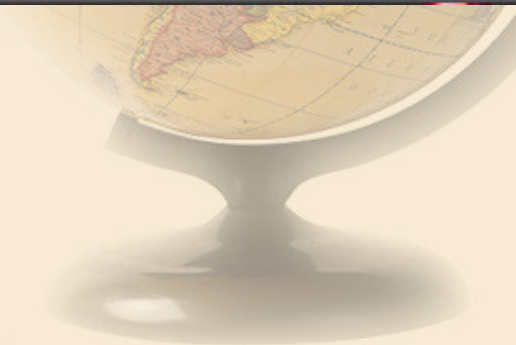


Turkish Americans in the United States, 2000



Politics of Identity and Immigration Policies

- Multiplicity
- Complexity
- Contextuality
- Contingency
- Fluidity



Defining Turkish Americanness

- Easternness
- Westernness
- Americanness
- Turkishness
- Islam
- Middle Easternness
- Asianness

- Who is a Turk? For instance, my father is Macedonian“. There are Albanians, Bosnians, Kurds, Jews, Arabs, Chechnians, and a lot of others in Turkey. We cannot reduce Turkishness to a single ethnicity. From a blonde person to Arab looking people, we have a lot of different backgrounds. Turkishness is a concept that represents all the people in Turkey, not just those who came from Central Asia”

Turhan

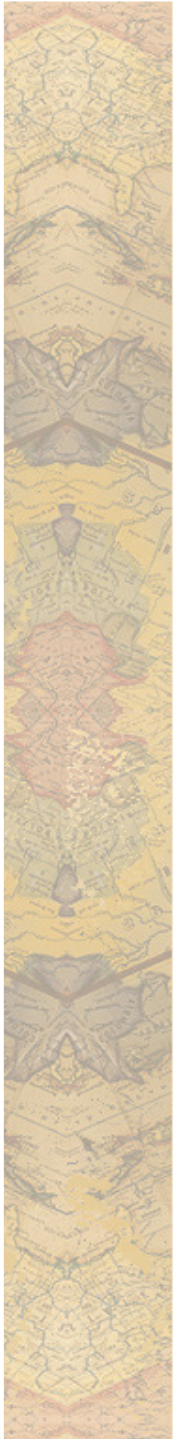
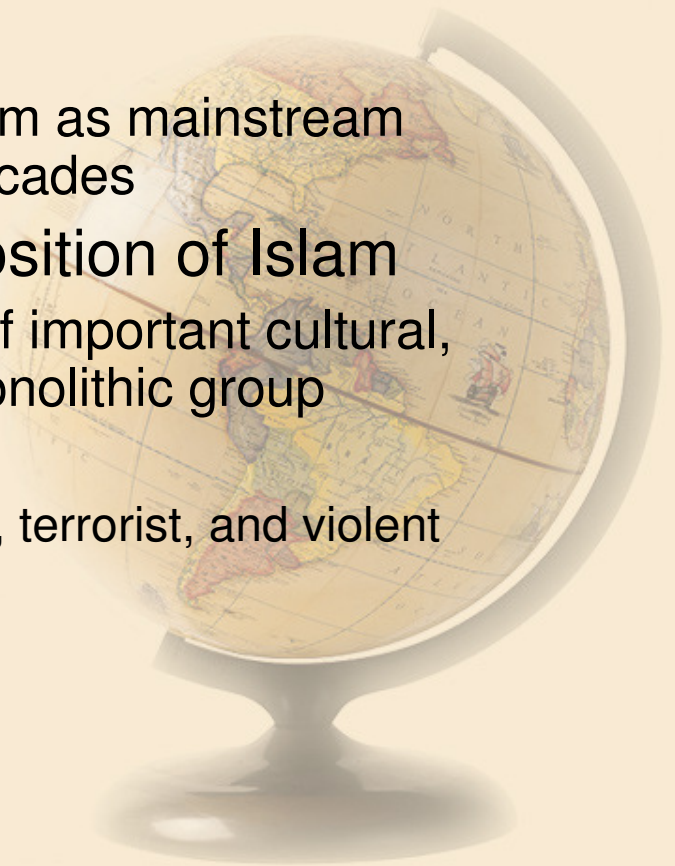
Integration and Boundaries

- Boundaries constructed by the larger society, government politics and by immigrants themselves
- The complicated historical relationship between the Muslim world and the West (America)
 - The collective memories of the Crusades, colonialism, and Western influences and interventions in the Muslim world shape Muslim perceptions of the West and America
 - The historical Muslim penetrations into Christian lands and various terrorist attacks over the last two decades have caused many people in the West view Muslims with suspicion
- The distrust between the two influences not only politics, but also everyday relations of Muslim Americans with other Americans



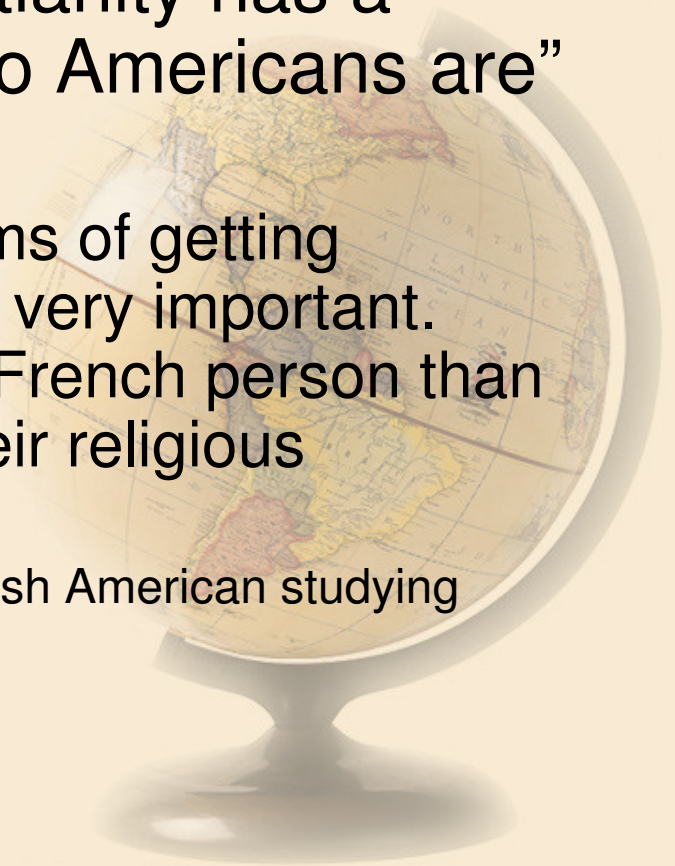
Institutionalization of religion and Immigrant Integration Politics

- The West including the US is NOT religiously neutral as it portrays itself
- Identification of the United States as a white and protestant country
 - Acceptance of Catholicism and Judaism as mainstream American religions in last couple of decades
- Monolithic view and problematic position of Islam
 - Categorizing all Muslims (regardless of important cultural, ethnic, religious differences) in one monolithic group
 - Islam is seen outside of the “norm”
 - An alien, non-Western, fundamentalist, terrorist, and violent religion



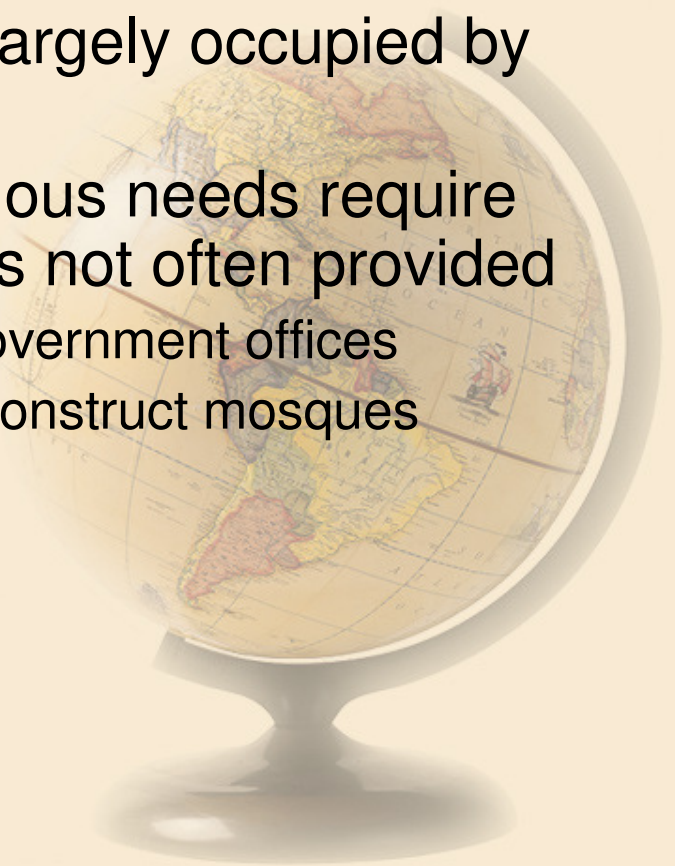
Institutionalization of religion and Immigrant Integration Politics

- The way religion is institutionalized in the United States makes it difficult for Muslims to achieve parity, because Christianity has a significant role in defining “who Americans are” (or who Europeans are)
 - “I think the role of religion in terms of getting accepted in the United States is very important. Americans may feel closer to a French person than they do to a Turk because of their religious similarities.”
 - » Ismail, a first generation Turkish American studying engineering



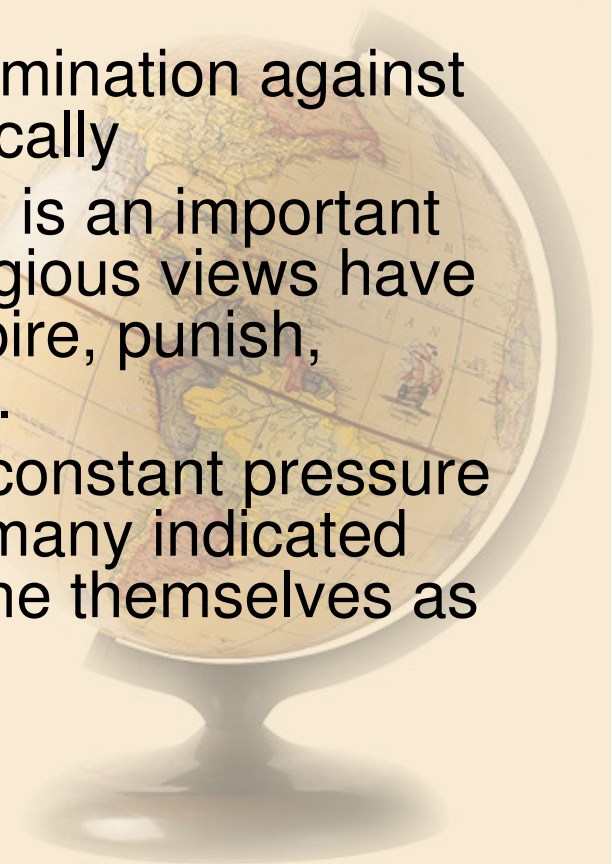
Institutionalization of religion and Immigrant Integration Politics

- The dominance of mainstream religions culturally and institutionally through holidays and rituals leaves little room for other religions such as Islam to be expressed
- Public space (malls, TV shows) is largely occupied by the mainstream religion/s
- Muslim worship practices and religious needs require special accommodations and that is not often provided
 - Worship places in airports, schools, government offices
 - The difficulty in getting permission to construct mosques
 - Turkish Americans in Long Island



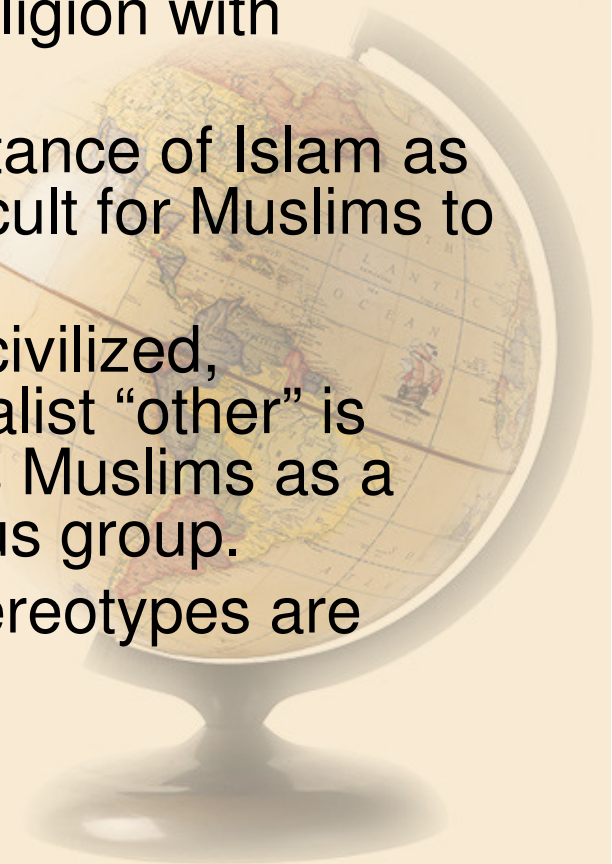
911 and Muslim Immigrants

- Muslim immigrants, organizations and businesses have been under strict scrutiny and many Muslim philanthropic organizations have been closed since the events of 911
- The number of hate crimes and discrimination against Muslim Americans increased dramatically
- The events have showed that religion is an important site of boundary construction and religious views have social power, as these views can inspire, punish, coerce, unite and divide communities.
- Muslim Americans have been under constant pressure to prove that they are American and many indicated that they feel that they need to redefine themselves as “good citizens”.



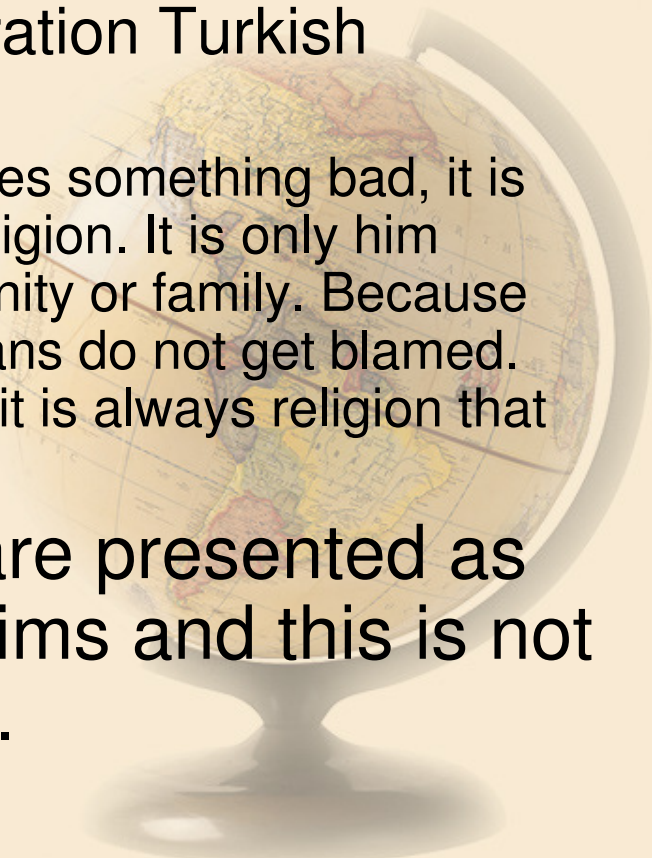
Representation and Muslim Identity

- The reception by the larger society is a very important element in the integration process.
- Various groups have posited and projected Islam as inherently violent and incompatible religion with Western values and norms
- The media representation and acceptance of Islam as an alien foreign religion makes it difficult for Muslims to become part of America.
- Portrayal of Muslims as irrational, uncivilized, threatening, and uniquely fundamentalist “other” is quite problematic because it presents Muslims as a threat rather than a cultural or religious group.
- Muslims that contradict with these stereotypes are presented as exception not the rule.



Identity, Crime and Representation

- Identifying the religion of Muslim criminals but not that of Christian or Jewish criminals is seen unfair
 - Ayten, a 17-year old second generation Turkish American states:
 - “when someone who is a Christian does something bad, it is always him, not his identity, not his religion. It is only him accused of his actions not his community or family. Because he does something bad, other Christians do not get blamed. When a Muslim does something bad, it is always religion that goes on trial.”
- Terrorists and fundamentalists are presented as ambassadors of Islam and Muslims and this is not accepted by Turkish immigrants.

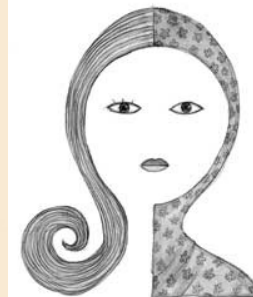


Turkish American Institutions and Construction of Boundaries

- Turkish American organizations and social networks form boundaries around their community as well as link the community to the larger society
 - Secular and religious organizations with their religious centers and schools have a great role in providing internal social cohesion within the Turkish American community and constructing boundaries.
- Interfaith dialogue programs link the religious community to other faith groups
 - The Amity School in Brooklyn and The Pioneer Academy of Science in Clifton, New Jersey
 - Mosques such as Fatih, Osmaniye, Selimiye etc.



Conclusions



- Immigration policies are not sustainable and quite populist
- Turkish American identity politics come from multiple sources of difference
- Religious boundaries often hinder integration of an ethnic group **not because the religious beliefs and practices of that ethnic group are radically different from those of the dominant society**, but because the way differences between the group and the larger society are politicized and represented.
- The way religion is institutionalized in the United States greatly influences the integration of Muslim immigrants
- The integration of immigrants into the larger culture is not totally in the hands of immigrant groups as their reception by the larger society is a crucial factor in the integration process.

Conclusions

- Equating Islam and Muslims with certain political tendencies such as terrorism, fundamentalism is very misleading and problematic, because it justifies the punishment of an entire religious community
- Such line of thinking ignores the history that shaped current hostilities and tendencies
- Turkish Americans often distance themselves from ethnic groups such as Arabs, because they think that somehow Arabs are responsible for creating such negative images of Muslims in the United States.



Thank you

- Questions?

