There are divergent views regarding the origin of the term Islamophobia. It appears to have been coined as an analogy to Xenophobia but exactly when, where, and by whom, is not certain. Some attribute the popularization of the term to a series of studies in the 1990s by The Runnymede Trust, an independent research and social policy agency in England. It was used in The Runnymede Trust report entitled *A Very Light Sleeper: the persistence and dangers of anti-Semitism* (1994) which led to a report entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (1997).

Robin Richardson, who edited The Runnymede Trust report and currently works for the educational consultancy Instead, maintains that the think tank simply borrowed the term from previous usage. He traces the term to Alain Quellien’s use of the French word Islamophobie in 1910 to criticize French colonial administrators for their treatment of Muslim subjects.

According to Richardson Professor Edward Said whose work on exposing the bias inherent in “Orientalism” had historic impact, was the first to use the word in English, when he wrote in 1985 about “the connection...between Islamophobia and antisemitism” and criticized writers who do not recognize that “hostility to Islam in the modern Christian West has historically gone hand in hand” with anti-Semitism” and “has stemmed from the same source and been nourished at the same stream.”

In 1996, The Runnymede Trust had established the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia which was chaired by Professor Sir Gordon Conway (Imperial College, London, former President of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Royal Geographical Society) and consisted of an eighteen-member, multi-ethnic and multi-religious committee. In February 1997, the Commission produced a consultation paper entitled *Islamophobia: its features and dangers* and distributed over 3500 copies of this paper to county councils and metropolitan authorities, police forces, government departments, race equality councils, a wide range of Muslim organizations and a number of leading professional associations, universities, unions and think-tanks. There was widespread media interest in this exploratory study.

Based on responses to the consultation paper, The Runnymede Trust produced the 1997 report which offered a more detailed explanation of Islamophobia. It highlighted the consequences of Islamophobia throughout society and made recommendations for practical action by government, teachers, lawyers, journalists, and by religious and community leaders.

The Commission collected evidence from the following:

1. Comments and suggestions received during the consultation process; and
2. Direct conversations and discussions between members of the Commission and important Muslim communities in Bradford and Tower Hamlets. Young Muslims in the 17-24 age range as well as community leaders were engaged in this process. In addition, members of the Commission addressed a variety of meetings and seminars throughout the country, including a large gathering in the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

The overall intention of the Commission was twofold:

(a) to counter Islamophobic assumptions that Islam is a single monolithic system, without internal development, diversity and dialogue; and

to draw attention to the principal dangers which Islamophobia creates or exacerbates for Muslim communities, and therefore for the well-being of society as a whole.

The Runnymede Trust report has ten chapters and contains sixty recommendations. It begins by describing the nature of anti-Muslim prejudice and draws a key distinction between “closed” and “open” views of Islam. Islamophobia is equated with “closed” views and its eight main features are as follows:

1. Monolithic - Islam seen as a single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities;

2. Separate - Islam seen as separate and other not having any aims and values in common with other cultures;

3. Inferior - Islam is seen as inferior to the West - barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist;

4. Enemy - Islam seen as a violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in a clash of civilizations;

5. Manipulative - Islam seen as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage;

6. Rejection of the criticism of the West - Muslims reject the West’s criticism of Islam out of hand;

7. Defensive of discrimination - hostility toward Islam used to justify discriminatory practices toward Muslims and their exclusion from mainstream society;

8. Islamophobia seen as national - anti-Muslim hostility accepted as natural and “normal”.

While emphasizing that freedom of speech and expression is an essential component of democracy, the Commission underscored the importance of having certain rules of engagement such that media coverage of Islam/Muslims is less distorted and negative. It also noted a particularly significant aspect of social exclusion - the vulnerability of Muslims to physical violence and harassment which prevented them from playing a full part in mainstream society. In
the view of the members of the Commission, violence against Muslims was both racial and religious and they stressed the need for an explicit recognition of this reality in any new legislation, as well as by race equality councils, housing authorities, police forces and inter-agency monitoring groups.

The Commission recommended that the twin themes of social inclusion and cultural pluralism be included centrally within the education system, as well as in citizenship education, and formal policies and guidance should be developed on meeting the pastoral, religious and cultural needs of Muslim pupils in mainstream schools, and that there should be state funding for Muslim schools. Emphasizing the need for legal changes, the Commission argues that this will consolidate the changes in public opinion and popular understanding which are outlined throughout the report.

In 2004, seven years after the 1997 Runnymede Trust report, a follow-up report entitled *Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action: a Report* was issued to consider the nature of Islamophobia in modern Britain, impact of September 11, 2001, and the ensuing wars. This report looks at four main areas of social, political and cultural life, namely, recognition of Muslim identities in the census and the legal system, tasks facing schools, community cohesion at street and neighborhood level, and ways of affecting media coverage. *Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action* has been regarded as a valuable practical guide by a wide range of professionals in education, government, law and the media in the U.K.

In our fast-moving world, it is both sad and strange that the findings and recommendations of The Runnymede Trust reports published in 1997 and 2004 are still not known to many policy-makers in concerned departments in this country. It would be a good start to review these reports and ponder how they may be applied in our society and community.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ISLAMOPHOBIA**

- Since the arrival of Muslims on the borders of Europe in the 7th century Muslims have been seen not only as the “other” but also as “the Adversary” or “Enemy”.

- Representation of the Prophet Muhammad in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in which the Prophet of Islam is placed in the second lowest circle in Hell. He is shown as split from head to foot with his inside hanging out – an unforgettable picture:

  
  A wine tun when a stave or cant-bar starts
  does not split open as wide as one I saw
  split from his chin to the mouth with which man farts.
  Between his legs all of his red guts
  hung with the heart, the lungs, the liver, the gallbladder, and
  the shriveled sac that passes shit to the bung.

  I stood and stared at him from the stone shelf;
  he noticed me and opening his own breast
  with both hands cried: “See how I rip myself!”
Prophet Muhammad is shown as split because he is being punished for his sin of “dividing” the world of Christendom.

- Between 1096 and 1291, eight Crusades were launched against Muslims by European Christian rulers supported by the Papacy. Initially the goal of the crusaders was to expel Muslims (called “the infidels”) from the Holy Land but the fighting spread to other parts of adjoining Muslim territories. *Jihad* is mis-translated as “holy war” which is what the term “crusade” means. *Jihad* does not mean “war” – it is a struggle, first and foremost, against one’s own shortcomings, and secondly, against social injustice and in defense of the oppressed.

- Prejudice against Islam continued into the modern period. In the 19th century, Thomas Carlyle, Scottish philosopher and writer, delivered a series of Lectures which were later published in a book entitled *On Heroes and Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. The second Lecture in the book, delivered on May 8, 1840, was entitled “Hero as Prophet: Mohomet: Islam.” Carlyle stated that he regarded Muhammad as “a true” prophet, insisting on his sincerity and pointing out “how one man single-handedly, could weld warring tribes and wandering Bedouins into a most powerful and civilized nation in less than two decades.” Aware of the fact that his view of Muhammad and Islam was at variance with most of his fellow-Christians, Carlyle try to evoke sympathy for Islam by saying, "Mohomet’s Creed we called a kind of Christianity; and really, if we look at the wild rapt earnestness with which it was believed and laid to heart, I should say a better kind than that of those miserable Syrian Sects…A bastard kind of Christianity but a living kind."

- Widespread ignorance about the “Golden Age of Islam and Judaism” in Spain which laid the foundations of the Renaissance in Europe. Eight hundred years of Muslim rule in which a great civilization was created – art, architecture, literature, philosophy and other branches of learning – profound influence of Muslim thinkers on Christian thinkers (St. Thomas Aquinas). In books of History of Western Civilization, this period is known as “The Dark Ages” – for whom?

- Fear and hatred of Islam has become a part of the Western Unconscious which surfaces whenever there is a crisis (Gulf War, Salman Rushdie’s book, 9/11)

**RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS ABOUT ISLAM/MUSLIMS**

**MARCH 10, 2016 Washington (CNN)** Donald Trump said Wednesday that he thinks “Islam hates us,” drawing little distinction between the religion and radical Islamic terrorism.

“I think Islam hates us,” Trump told CNN’s Anderson Cooper, deploring the “tremendous hatred” that he said partly defined the religion. He maintained the war was against radical Islam, but said, “it’s very hard to define. It’s very hard to separate. Because you don’t know who’s who.”

**July 31, 2016**
Pope Francis is once again making headlines for comments declaring, as he has before, that Islam is not “terroristic” and that all religions, including Catholicism, have “fundamentalist” splinter groups that can commit violence.

Asked about the brutal slaying of an elderly priest in France who was killed by two Muslim teens while he was saying Mass, Francis said “the world is at war” but it is not a war of religion.

“Some might think it is war of religion. It is not. All religions want peace. Others want war,” the Pope said.

The pontiff drew both praise and condemnation for his remarks. Among his critics, the Rev. Franklin Graham: “I agree that the world is at war — but I disagree that it’s not a war of religion,” Graham, son of the famous evangelist Billy Graham, wrote in a Facebook post July 31. “It is most certainly a war of religion.”

He continued:

“Religion is behind the violence and jihad we’re seeing in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and here in this country. It’s a religion that calls for the extermination of ‘infidels’ outside their faith, specifically Jews and Christians. It’s a religion that calls on its soldiers to shout ‘Allahu Akbar’ (‘God is Great’ in Arabic) as they behead, rape, and murder in the name of Islam. Radical Islamists are following the teachings of the Quran. We should call it what it is.”

“Islam Is of the Devil”

Terry Jones authored a book titled Islam Is of the Devil. In July 2009, Dove World Outreach Center posted a sign on its lawn which stated in large red letters “Islam is of the Devil,” resulting in objections from the community and media attention. Students from the church attended area schools in August 2009 wearing T-shirts with “Islam is of the Devil” printed on the back, for which they were sent home.

Qur’an burnings

Main article: 2010 Florida Qur'an-burning controversy

Jones and his followers at a march in Washington DC.

Jones believes Islam promotes violence and that Muslims want to impose Shari‘ah law in the United States. He did not become widely known until after announcing plans to burn copies of the Qur’an. The plan to burn Qur’ans was first announced on Twitter on July 12, 2010, and was
promoted on Facebook and on YouTube. National and International discussion, objections and protests contributed to extensive media coverage.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “It's regrettable that a pastor in Gainesville, Florida with a church of no more than fifty people can make this outrageous and distressful, disgraceful plan and get, you know, the world's attention.”

The commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus said, “It is precisely the kind of action the Taliban uses and could cause significant problems. Not just here, but everywhere in the world we are engaged with the Islamic community.”

The pastor responded to Petraeus’ statement that, “We understand the General's concerns. We are sure that his concerns are legitimate. [Nonetheless] [w]e must send a clear message to the radical element of Islam. We will no longer be controlled and dominated by their fears and threats.”

President Barack Obama was asked on September 9, 2010, on ABC’s Good Morning America about the Qur’an burning controversy. He said, “You could have serious violence in places like Pakistan or Afghanistan. This could increase the recruitment of individuals who would be willing to blow themselves up in American cities or European cities.” He said, “I just want him to understand that this stunt that he is talking about pulling could greatly endanger our young men and women in uniform who are in Iraq, who are in Afghanistan. We're already seeing protests against Americans just by the mere threat that he’s making.” “I just hope he understands that what he is proposing to do is completely contrary to our values as Americans, that this country has been built on the notions of religious freedom and religious tolerance,” Obama said. “He says he's someone who is motivated by his faith ... I hope he listens to those better angels and understands that this is a destructive act that he’s engaging in.”

(Presented on August 7, 2018, at the First Session of a Short Course on “Understanding Terrorism” held at the Louisville Free Public Library in partnership with The Salaam Network )