

Arabophobia and Arab-Conscious Hip-Hop

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Abstract – Designation of Arabs as the quintessential Other in America is considered in response to events witnessed on September 11, 2001. Cowardly, menacing, violent – are words used to describe 9/11. American popular culture, not surprisingly, has used the same words to describe Arabs for decades. American popular culture has always undermined Arabs' existence. Distorted images of Arabs have become a part of the American visual psyche, influencing education, politics and policies. Therefore 9/11 to an extent provided the framework for systemic discrimination against Arabs and those assumed to be Arabs. My essay advances a definition of Arabophobia, calling for differentiation between racial discrimination and religious discrimination, i.e., Arabophobia and Islamophobia. Arab hip-hop artists in response to criminalisation of Arabs and wars in the Middle East, I argue, have taken up a quintessential American medium to enter the popular discourse surrounding Arabs and counter the dominant narrative dictating Arab lives. Arab-conscious hip-hop is the actualisation of a cultural protest by Arabs for better representation. Instead of being portrayed by apathetic popular culture, Arab artists challenge the same culture and create conditions and possibilities for social change. Arab-conscious hip-hop counters Arab stereotypes with potential to educate audiences and (re)construct the Arab identity. In the essay I discuss the song "P.H.A.T.W.A." by The Narcicyst. Elements of the song I present reconstructs the Arab identity by reclaiming symbols of discrimination, the same way African Americans did with hip-hop in the 80's, and berating American for using 9/11 as an excuse for fascist wars and institutional discrimination. The Narcicyst, through "P.H.A.T.W.A.," creates a sense of consciousness for socio-political transformation.