One of the most detrimental examples of Muslims in modern day film is *American Sniper* a 2014 drama biopic about the life of and experiences of Navy Seal Chris Kyle. The film was directed by Clint Eastwood, it was written by Jason Hall, and based upon the book of the same name by Chris Kyle himself. The film made $89 million in its opening weekend and too date it has made $350,126,372 making it the third highest grossing R rated movie of all time according to the MPAA.

The film mostly focuses on Kyle’s four tours of duty in Iraq with occasion breaks in which he returns home to his wife. While in Iraq Kyle shows a range of emotions towards his job as a navy seal sniper, at his best he is a cold killer who eliminates his targets with precision and little thought, but at some points in the film he finds himself pausing and contemplating what he’s about too do. Despite occasional run-ins with PTSD the main antagonists of the film are the Muslim insurgents in Iraq and in particular a sniper named Mustafa. The film is extremely degrading towards Muslims since it only portrays them as evil creatures whose only purpose in life is too kill as many United States marines as possible.

The only named antagonist of the film Mustafa, is a mirror image of Kyle, both are celebrated snipers in their respective causes and they are both shown to have children. But a main distinction between the two men aside from their military affiliations is their religion. Kyle is a bible carrying Christian who does what he does because he wants to protect his country in the name of his god. Whereas Mustafa is simply a Muslim combatant and any possible complex motivations he could have for joining the fight against the United States is conveniently left out. By omitting any real motivation for the only Muslim in the film that the audience sees on screen for more than a few seconds, it eliminates any chance for the audience to sympathize with the cause of the films Muslim characters. Without being able to sympathize with or understand the motivations of the films Muslim characters the viewer only sees the Muslims through the eyes of Kyle who commonly refers to the Muslims as “them” and “savages”. Kyle strips away the humanity from his enemy combatants in order to make his job of killing them easier to emotionally deal with, but for the audience who don’t need that emotional buffer all his euphemisms do is reduce the Muslim characters of the film into nothing more than simple minded homicidal savages.

One of the most emotionally powerful scenes in the film but also one of the most detrimental towards the image of Muslims in the audience’s eyes is the opening of the film when Kyle finds himself providing sniper support for a marine convoy clearing out a series of houses. The scene is broken up into two parts in the film, when it is first shown Kyle spots a male in his mid thirties on a cell phone and contemplates shooting the man because he could be contacting insurgents but before he makes up his mind the man steps out of Kyle’s sight. Kyle is then confronted with probably his most intense decision point in the whole film, a burka clad women and young boy emerge from one of the houses and start to approach the Marine convoy. Kyle immediately realizes that the woman is carrying something and she soon brandishes a Russian hand grenade that she gives to her son. The boy starts running towards the convoy and Kyle begins begging under his breath for the child to stop but he knows that he is going to have to shoot the child. This dramatic scene takes an unexpected turn when the camera pans to Kyle’s finger moving for the trigger, the screen cuts out, a gunshot is heard, and the audience finds themselves witnessing Kyle’s first time killing a deer with his father. The sudden change is problematic because as the child was Kyle’s first kill in Iraq, it draws a parallel between shooting a deer and a child. By comparing the two actions the film reduces the Muslim mother and child to nothing more than game animals that are being hunted for sport. This is only furthered when the film picks up the scene after about fifteen minutes of giving the audience a general idea of Kyle’s life before that moment. Including a scene where he is told any none-American male of military age in Fallujah is there to kill him, which setups the audience’s opinion of any future male Muslim characters in the film to immediately be negative. Once the film returns to Kyle’s run in with the mother and son the audience is forced to witness the child being shot, his mother rushing to pick up the grenade, and then Kyle shooting her too. The mother’s reaction to her child’s death is pinnacle of the film’s ignorance towards the motivations of its Muslim characters, since the message conveyed to the audience is that this woman would rather try and kill United States soldiers than mourn the death of her child. When in real life the mother would have most likely tried to drag her bleeding son to safety and tend to his wounds. Kyle’s spotter than immediately starts congratulating him on saving the day and saying how amazing what he just did was, Kyle has none of this and immediately tells the man to shut up. It appears that the film is paying respect to the horrible situation that just transpired and is trying to make sure that the audience doesn’t lose sight of the humanity of Kyle’s victims. But within five minutes the film begins its primary montage of Kyle indiscriminately shooting Iraq insurgents and even features a part where Kyle is being a reprimanded for shooting a man who according to his wife was carrying a Quran but, Kyle says it was an AK-47 and is immediately let off the hook. The montage undoes any humanity that the audience may have perceived the Muslim characters as having when Kyle grieved over shooting the child and his mother because Kyle cuts down the insurgents like cattle while the camera operator ensures that a bible is always in the frame, and then Kyle is dubbed the “Legend” a title that reoccurs for the rest of the film. Kyle and his fellow Army members disregard for the lives and motivations of the opposing force creates an othering effect that the audience is then expected to use as emotion justification for the protagonists actions.

Kyle’s dehumanization of his enemies is something that he does to deal with the emotion trauma of war and there are arguments to be made for if that is right or wrong, but the issue with it in *American Sniper* is that the audience is never presented with an alternate. While the story of the film is a reflection of the way people in combat rationalize their actions, the way that message is conveyed to the viewers is a reflection of how media in general deals with Muslims. Instead of Muslims being seen as a larger group with certain bad subsets, the media has instead tends to group Muslims under the banner of Islamic extremism because that way they can just point a finger at them and call foul rather than actually delving into the complex issues that surround Islamic extremism. This simplified approach may work for soldiers such as Chris Kyle but when it is amplified as the normal way to view Muslims it creates a society that views Muslims, the same way Kyle did, as savages.