



The Chicago Reporter

RACE AND CULTURE

20 Years After 09/11, Anti-Arab Imperialist Racism Is Alive And Well



by The Chicago Reporter

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The idea that anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism started after September 11, 2001, is one thing many progressives get wrong. At least since the late 1970s, the U.S. government has been racially profiling Arab immigrant activists through surveillance and the corporate media has been portraying Arabs as savage misogynists.

This racial profiling continued through the Clinton administration with the Omnibus Counterterrorism Bill of 1995. The bill, supported by then Senator Joe Biden, enabled the new McCarthyism that many people contend started after 9/11. It allowed the government to use secret evidence in deportation proceedings for “aliens.” Consequently, the government could hide the source of information used to deport someone. Arab Muslim immigrant men were the primary population targeted by such secret evidence. Also, President Clinton’s executive order froze the assets of extremist groups—nearly all were Muslim or Arab.

Since then, we have witnessed the horrific post-9/11 backlash that devastated Arab and Muslim American life with hate crimes, government surveillance, FBI raids, interrogation, arrests, detentions, due process violations, and airport policing. The Trump administration then ramped up government attacks on people perceived to be Muslim through the Muslim Ban and the unleashing of the most egregious levels of hatred resulting in killings and hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in the U.S.

Also during the Trump era, a growing solidarity movement supporting Arab and Muslim immigrant communities stepped up to demand an end to the imperial war on terror, the Muslim Ban, and the widespread hatred and violence.

Yet now that Joe Biden is in office, I wonder if the urgency of ending anti-Arab and anti-Muslim imperialist racism is dwindling. Perhaps Biden’s rhetoric about supporting Muslims — despite the racism that is baked

into the national security policies he supports — has convinced people of this.

The research I am co-leading with the Arab American community in Chicago and the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy at UIC, however, tells a different story. The Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism that has been justifying and reinforcing U.S.-led war for decades remains highly devastating—and alarming.

Many people seem to forget that state-based racism in policy and government and media rhetoric trickles down into neighborhoods and institutions like hospitals, schools, policing, airports, and public space. These everyday forms of racism disproportionately permeate the everyday lives of working class recent Arab Muslim immigrants. Today, this trickle-down effect is not getting any better.

During the period of our research, we learned about an Arab Muslim whose peers at school emptied out their backpack and scribbled “terrorist” all over it.” They transferred schools after such aggressive experiences.

A suburban woman told us she was harassed by her neighbors who say “F Arabs, F Muslims” and “Get out of the United States” for the last three years. She said she felt like a hostage in her own apartment and fears leaving her teenagers home alone.

A young woman told us that while she was out eating dinner with her family, a car zoomed by and passengers screamed “terrorists.”

Some families with members who wear the *hijab* regularly experience incidents where after they sit down at a public place like a park, another family sitting next to them packs up and moves to another location away from them.

These may appear as individual examples and across society. People are often quick to explain perpetrators of these hateful acts as merely a few “bad apples.”

Yet I believe they result from social cues people, and particularly young people, take from political figures, policy makers, and news sources such as Fox News. Even President Barack Obama was a target. If the president of the United States could be targeted with such racism by Trump and others, it’s no wonder that Arab and Muslim youth and families are too.

During the 2008 presidential campaign Senator John McCain was frequently given false credit for correcting a woman who attempted to vilify Obama as “an Arab.” McCain said, “No ma’am, no ma’am, he’s a decent family man, citizen,” leaving the impression that if Obama was an Arab American he couldn’t be a good

person or even a citizen. Of course, once in office Obama drone-bombed civilians, kept Guantanamo open, and deported millions of Black and brown people.

Then, for four years with Trump at the helm, we had state policies intentionally discriminating against Muslims, Arabs and other groups, particularly immigrants trying to cross the US southern border. These policies don't just flip off with a change in administration. ICE agents giddy with the power of deporting people don't just suddenly become non-racists with a change from Trump to Biden. Nor will school bullies change overnight. Imperialist, racist systems don't just change with a new person at the top and, in fact, Biden has shown himself to be in no hurry to reverse Trump-era imperial racism from Palestine to the southern border.

We are at the beginning of a long process of undoing not just the last four years, or even centuries of U.S. history, but also the U.S. empire and its colonizing racist capitalist nature. Already the backlash has begun against teaching even the history of racism in the U.S. as somehow discriminatory against white students.

This week should be a time to reflect on how politicians took the country in dangerous directions after 9/11, both in imperialist wars abroad and at home with racist, misogynist patriotic rhetoric too frequently stoked with painful ramifications for Arab and Muslim immigrants and their children—including many who are here because the U.S. went to war “over there”— simply trying to live their lives.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/2020-census-continues-whitewashing-middle-eastern-americans-ncna1212051>

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