



OUR VOICES

Blatant Racism Against Muslims Is Still With Us



by The Chicago Reporter

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Shortly after his inauguration, President Joe Biden reversed former President's Donald Trump's Muslim Travel Ban, stating those actions are a stain on our national conscience." This stance aligns with that of the tens of thousands of protesters who, at the time the first Muslim Travel Ban was enacted in January 2017, took to the streets and to airports across the country with slogans such as, "We are all Immigrants," "Standing with Muslims against Islamophobia," and "Stop Hatred against Muslims." To be sure, the Muslim Travel Ban is a racist policy. It seeks to keep out or deport people perceived to be Muslim based upon the racist assumption that "they" are violent potential terrorist enemies of the U.S. nation. The ban was an executive order that prevented individuals from primarily Muslim countries, and later, from many African countries, from entering the United States.

Yet ending the Muslim Ban only scratches the surface of a much larger problem. If progressives really want to end anti-Muslim racism, we are going to need a more radical approach, that requires, as Angela Davis reminds us, "grasping things at the root." The root cause of the Muslim Ban is anti-Muslim racism, which has many roots. Europeans perceived Islam and Muslims as a barbaric threat ever since its arrival in the 7th century. White Christian supremacist thought perceived "Islam" as a threat when Black people found within it liberatory possibilities in the context of the transatlantic slave trade and far beyond. Contemporary anti-Muslim racism grew especially out of the post-Cold War period when the U.S. began launching its imperialist wars in the Arab region and growing its unconditional support for Israeli settler-colonialism. Out of this context, anti-Muslim racism, based on the idea that all Palestinians and Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are potential terrorists, was institutionalized through domestic and global policies and the U.S. corporate media's rhetoric.

After the U.S. first confirmed its alliance with Israel in 1967, U.S. government and media rhetoric portrayed Palestinians Arabs and Muslims as terrorist enemies. At this time, the FBI began harassing and stifling the voices of Arab students and activists based upon this racist logic. In the 1980s, seven Palestinians and one Kenyan were placed into deportation proceedings for enacting free speech rights. Their case, referred to as the

L.A. 8, revealed a secret plan to intern Arab Americans. The period of the first Iraq war brought President Bill Clinton's Omnibus Counterterrorism Bill, introduced by then-Sen. Joe Biden, granting the U.S. government the power to deport individuals based upon secret evidence. A form of racial profiling, the U.S. used this bill to target primarily Arab Muslim men. The post-9-11 era consolidated the racial profiling of people perceived to be Muslim in the U.S. through airport profiling, surveillance of Muslim communities, detention, deportations, special registration of immigrants, and much more. All along, the racist idea of the "Muslim terrorist enemy" has justified the war on terror abroad and legitimized the racial profiling of Muslims in the U.S. as an extension of this war.

Whether it is global war or domestic surveillance, anti-Muslim racism devastates the lives of local Muslim and Muslim American communities. Consider the reality whereby U.S. law enforcement officials have placed Muslim communities under surveillance that in some cases, have entailed entrapment. Also consider the racial profiling that underlies the current Countering Violent Extremism program whereby simply praying five times a day can render any Muslim as someone who embodies the potential for violent extremism. While conducting research with Arab American communities, I have met many Muslim immigrant mothers who stay up at night fearing their son will be picked up for a crime they never committed. A simple trip involving air travel also can devastate any Arab or Muslim family. In 2019, an Arab Christian immigrant father told me that he couldn't print his boarding pass at O'Hare. When he went to the ticket counter with his middle school age kids, the agent announced, in front of everyone in line, that the Department of Homeland Security is blocking him from boarding the plane. Although he may never know why his name showed up on a No-Fly list, his experience with racial profiling has damaged his mental health and that of his children. Anti-Muslim racism within the system of policing takes a distinct toll on the lives of Muslim women. When officers like the Chicago Police Union President's post that "all Muslims deserve a bullet," it would not be a stretch to assume that Muslim women are not going to call the police for help when they experience domestic violence. Globally, it is no secret that hundreds of men have been taken to the torturous prison camp of Guantanamo Bay or tortured in overt U.S. prisons like Abu-Ghraib or secret CIA prisons through extraordinary rendition and that millions of Yemenis, Afghans, Iraqis, Syrians, Iranians and Palestinians have been killed or displaced by U.S.-led militarism. Truly ending anti-Muslim racism will require widescale systemic change. If progressives really care about ending anti-Muslim racism, we need to stand for ending the war on terror in all of its forms. Given recent strikes on Syria, my community of progressive Arab and Muslim immigrants is gravely concerned that Biden may turn out to be a more hawkish than President Trump and that the continuation of the war on terror will have grave anti-Muslim consequences not only abroad, but also here in the U.S. and in Chicago. For instance, the Biden Administration needs to stop all forms of racial profiling, including the surveillance of Arab and Muslim Americans and stop supporting the Israeli government's oppression of Palestinians, including gross funding for the egregious Israeli military and as founder of Palestine Legal, Dima Khalidi explains, undo Trump's executive order that silences Palestinian voices in the U.S. The Biden administration also needs to end U.S. support for the war in Yemen and say no to all forms of reckless killing and the use of militarism as a strategy of global political and economic dominance. Such policies changes can go a long way. More than ever before, it's time to change racist,

common sense ways of thinking about Arabs, Iranians, Afghans, and anyone perceived to be connected, in one way or another, to the idea of a “Muslim terrorist threat.”

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