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WESTWORD

WEB EXCLUSIVES

Anti-Muslim bias continues long after 9/11

Commentary

by Sarah Espinosa
Staff Writer



September 11, 2001, was a tragic day for the United States. It was also a day that sparked a new wave of prejudice against Muslims. Once Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaida were identified as being responsible for the Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks, many Muslims began to be discriminated against. When such feelings first surfaced, I was young and naïve and did not know the serious nature of the issue. Once I started to mature, I realized how popular it had become to stereotype against anyone who had a name that sounded Islamic or against anyone who looked “Muslim.”

My education continued one recent summer when I was on vacation. I was in the airport going through the baggage check. For the first time, I notice how many people were stopped and scrutinized more closely by security personnel solely because of the way they looked or because of their accent. When I realized how many of those people were Muslim, it occurred to me that the U.S. had not moved far beyond those post-9/11 fears. Why should people who have lived here their entire lives and are American citizens be questioned about their loyalty to this country?

The anti-Muslim sentiment really hit home when I began my current romantic relationship with a Muslim of Bosnian descent. His religion does not bother me, but I have noticed that others are bothered by my dating a Muslim.

Although I never thought that my boyfriend’s religion would be an issue with any of my friends, I have received comments such as: “Is your boyfriend going to kidnap you this weekend?” Others have asked, “Is your boyfriend still a part of the Taliban?”

Islam is not even my religion, yet I feel horrible. Imagine how it feels to be discriminated as an American Muslim when you have done nothing wrong. Although every ethnicity is discriminated against for something (I am Hispanic, so I know all too well), to label others killers and terrorists is pushing things much too far.

On Dec. 7, 1941, the only previous attack on the U.S., the naval base at Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japan, a circumstance that initiated the U.S. involvement in World War II and the shameful internment of Japanese-Americans. Eventually, this country’s leaders apologized to those Americans punished merely for being of Japanese descent, and bigotry against Japanese-Americans has all but disappeared.

How long will it take for America and Americans to afford citizens who practice Islam the same courtesy?