

Identity Issues For Young Muslims Post-9/11

By Kamran Memon

Life in post-9/11 America can be very stressful for young Muslims who feel tension because their country, America, is at war with some of their fellow Muslims in various parts of the world.

Islamic schools should provide young Muslims with information and guidance about issues relating to 9/11 and the “War on Terror,” so that young Muslims don’t have to cope with these issues by themselves.

Young Muslims are forced to deal intellectually and psychologically with various aspects of 9/11 and the “War on Terror” when they surf the Internet, watch TV shows or movies, listen to the radio, read books or magazines, talk to their friends, or listen to their parents’ conversations.

Islamic schools can be an important source of information and guidance for young Muslims who have to deal intellectually and psychologically with 9/11 and the “War on Terror.” Unfortunately, Islamic schools have limited resources, so they often lack the tools to effectively teach about 9/11 and the “War on Terror.”

Because these issues can be challenging to teach, and because Muslim students are often curious about these issues, *Muslims For A Safe America*¹ has produced several one-page, double-sided handouts dealing with a number of topics related to 9/11 and the “War on Terror.”

Teachers and students find our material useful, because we don't take sides; we don't tell teachers and students what to think. We just provide information on important issues from various perspectives, so that students have an opportunity to use their critical thinking skills to work through the tensions they feel and reach informed conclusions on various issues based on classroom discussion and debate. Most of our pieces are set up like debates, with pros and cons, which students find interesting.

Our material is divided into three areas: Religion/Identity, Domestic Security, and Foreign Policy:

Debates About Religion and Identity

- Should American Muslims Be Loyal To America?
- Should American Muslims Join the American Armed Forces?
- Are Western Civilians Legitimate Targets in War?
- Should American Muslims Work As Government Informants?

¹ *Muslims For A Safe America* (muslimsforasafeamerica.org) is a 501(c)(3) organization based in Chicago. *Muslims For A Safe America* encourages honest and informed discussion about how to make Muslims and America safer. *Muslims For A Safe America* receives no funding from any government or foundation; *Muslims For A Safe America* is funded entirely by small contributions from individuals. For more information about the work of *Muslims For A Safe America*, see the January/February 2008 issue of *Islamic Horizons*, page 34.

Debates About Domestic Security

- Should American Mosques Be Watched By The Government?
- Should America Torture Muslims Suspected Of Plotting Terrorist Attacks?
- Should The Government Profile Muslims At Airports?
- Should America Allow A Muslim Country To Manage Some American Seaports?

Debates About Foreign Policy

- Should America Promote “Freedom and Democracy” In Muslim Countries?
- Should America Attack Iran To Prevent Iran From Developing Nuclear Weapons?
- Should America Promote Full Or Partial Restoration Of The Rule Of Law In Pakistan?
- Did Invading Iraq Make America Safer?
- Should The U.S. Deny Financial Aid To A Hamas Government?
- Is The Summer 2006 Israel-Hezbollah-Lebanon War Making America Safer?

Our approach is the same in all three areas; we ask a question that young Muslims have been forced to confront since 9/11, and then we give arguments on both sides of the issue, without telling them what the “right” answer is.

For example, in our Religion/Identity handout called “Should American Muslims Be Loyal To America?”, we present six arguments by those who believe Muslims *should* be loyal to America, followed by six arguments by those who believe Muslims *should not* be loyal to America.

In our Domestic Security handout called “Should American Mosques Be Watched By The Government?”, we present seven arguments by those who *oppose* watching mosques, followed by seven arguments by those who *favor* watching mosques.

In our Foreign Policy handout called “Should America Promote ‘Freedom And Democracy’ In Muslim Countries?”, we present four arguments by those who believe that America *should* promote ‘freedom and democracy’ in Muslim countries, followed by four arguments by those who believe that America *should not* promote ‘freedom and democracy’ in Muslim countries.

By explicitly articulating the pro and con arguments that are floating around in the Muslim community and in American society, we give Muslim students an opportunity to understand the “big picture” regarding important issues and to resolve the tensions they feel regarding the conflict between America and some Muslims.

We get our pro and con arguments by researching materials produced by people who actually hold those various points of view. Then we present each side as it would present itself, without any editorial comment by us. In other words, we try to make the best case argument for each side, so that Muslim students get a real sense of the debate. The arguments we present aren’t original. What is original is the way we present all the basic information in a short, neutral, easy to understand format.

On a related note, we also encourage Islamic schools to provide young Muslims with forums to have an open and honest discussion about what happened on 9/11. A 2007 Pew Research Center study found that sixty percent of Muslims in America are not convinced that Arabs were

involved in 9/11; forty percent do believe Arabs were involved.² (Two Zogby International surveys show that many Americans of other faiths are also skeptical about the official government story.³) This belief among many Muslims that their own government, the U.S. government, framed Muslims on 9/11 in order to justify further oppression of Muslims creates significant tension and depression in the American Muslim community at the grassroots. Unfortunately, young Muslims lack forums where they can comfortably discuss these issues, where they can receive accurate information from different perspectives, and where they can resolve their tensions regarding this major event in American history. Islamic schools should fill that void.

Once young Muslims resolve their internal tensions and develop some clarity on issues relating to 9/11 and the “War On Terror,” then these students will be ready to go out and get involved in the discussions that the rest of the country is already having about these issues. They will be ready to start having serious and informed discussions with their neighbors, classmates, and friends. They will be ready to start calling in to radio shows and writing letters to the editor. They will be ready to start talking to their elected representatives. They will have some basic information about important issues, and they will have thought through the issues, so they will be able to proceed with confidence.

This process will help make Muslim students more effective citizens and lead to the long-term strengthening of the American Muslim community.

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² <http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf>

³ <http://www.zogby.com/search/ReadNews.dbm?ID=855> and <http://www.911truth.org/images/911TruthZogbyPollFinalReport.htm>