Consuela Villegas

Ms. Engelbert

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America: Land of the Free?

During building years of America, people of different nationalities flocked to both the west and east coasts in search of “streets paved with gold” and a chance to chase down the “American Dream”. However, immigrants did not account for the disdain that they would receive from other races, religions, and people of differing economic station. While the Statue of Liberty says, “Give us your tired, give us your poor,” critics agree that our country, especially in recent years has not been so welcoming to foreigners. Racial profiling is a problem that continues to plague the leaders of our society and people at large. Our nation must abandon stereotypes and adopt an open and accepting attitude towards those who have as much a right to be here as anyone, especially Muslim Americans.

# KEY FACTORS

On September 11th, 2001, 2997 people in New York City, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, PA lost their lives when four fuel loaded planes heading to west coast destinations were hijacked by extremists following the commands of al Qaeda terrorist group leader Osama bin Laden (CNN Library). After this event, suspecting attitudes by Americans in regards to Muslim Americans began to fester.

On December 2nd 2015, ISIS radicals (on American soil) Tashfeen Malik and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi shot 21 people to death and injured 21 others at a social gathering in San Bernadino, according to the FBI (Lister). Coupled with ISIS attacks around the world including tragedies in Paris, France and Manchester, England during an Ariana Grande concert, America paranoia towards Muslim Americans has begun to steadily grow, and it is still growing. This paranoia has turned to fear, and fear has turned into legislation and free reign to harass and search Muslim Americans at airports and those entering the country.

EVIDENCE

However, just because an attack came from a person of one particular religious group does not mean that everyone who follows that particular religion has the seeds of a terrorist. Our government should not religiously profile people simply for exercising their right to practice religion or even live in the United States.

On January 27th, 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order to ban immigrants from the countries of Iran, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, and Sudan, which are predominantly Muslim countries. According to CNN Correspondents Laura Jarrett and Sophie Tatum, “Individuals with that "bona fide" exception -- such as a foreign grandparent of a US citizen -- can still apply for visas until October 18. After that date, the new restrictions on travel will begin. The revised travel ban affecting those from six-Muslim majority countries officially expired earlier Sunday, and Sudan was removed from the list of affected countries”. Over subsequent months, state and city officials, judges, and organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union have responded to the travel ban by calling it unconstitutional and blocking the implementation in their respective districts in addition to filing injunctions. The Supreme Court is set to hear arguments on both sides next month.

Banning valid travelers, visa holders and citizens from coming to the United States is a pure example of assigning guilt by association. Not every Muslim, especially American citizens traveling and returning back home are Islamic extremists. In fact, one of the terrorists responsible for the San Bernardino tragedy was born in raised in Chicago, Illinois and still somehow managed to be radicalized as an American citizen. If Americans on our own soil can be swayed by ISIS, then why most the government impose restrictions on those around the world when the problem is happening in our own backyard?

In fact, more than 90% of terrorist attacks happening on US soil between 1980-2005 were credited to non-Muslims (globalresearch.org). Banning persons who follow this religion of of this ethnic descent seems completely unfounded. Furthermore, Muslim Americans traveling domestically throughout the United States are often racially profiled using “observation techniques” and most undergo extra searches and embarrassing detainments without documented evidence. We as a nation can do better and must do better.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the travel ban and heightened security at airports is meant to keep Americans safe, there is no valid proof that these practices will deter homegrown terrorists or prevent suicide bombers from loading a plane. In 2015, the Department of Homeland Security investigated TSA security be attempted to board planes with bombs and other explosives. TSA failed 95% of the undercover tests conducted across the nation (Bradner and Marsh). If a test “terrorist” can sneak explosives onto a plane, the problem does not lie with a person’s ethnicity but our security system instead.

To combat weapons on planes, airport security protocol needs an overhaul. Body scanners and bag scanners must be upgraded. Agents must have the most up-to-date training. Most importantly, TSA agents need diversity training on how to handle people meeting their criteria on the observable point scale system that is now implemented to evaluate threats.

Lastly, we are a country that listens to the majority. The travel ban continues to meet opposition because the people who see it as quintessential racial profiling speak up. Keep calling your congresspersons. Keep writing to your representatives. March. Create music. Blog. Vote. When voices rise, change happens.

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