

Arab-Americans and Muslims attacked in the US

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In the midst of the chauvinist fever being whipped up by the government and media following the terror attacks in New York and Washington, scores of violent incidents and threats against Arab-Americans and Muslims have been reported.

Arab immigrants and their community centers, mosques and businesses have been hit by Molotov cocktails, bullets and bricks. Buildings have been defaced with graffiti and numerous bomb threats have occurred. In one incident a drunken 75-year-old man, screaming, "You're destroying my country," tried to run down a Pakistani woman in a Long Island parking lot.

Leaders of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and the Arab American Institute (AAI) report there have been over 200 incidents of abuse directed against Arab-Americans since the September 11 terror attacks. Ibrahim Hooper of the Council on American-Islamic Relations said, "The atmosphere is very tense for Muslims in this country." Fearing violence, some families have kept children out of school and a number of mosques and Islamic academies remain closed.

In the Chicago suburb of Bridgeview Wednesday night police turned back 300 people who were shouting "USA, USA" and marching on a local mosque. In nearby Palo Heights someone used a 2-foot machete to attack a gas station attendant he thought was Arabic. Someone else threw a Molotov cocktail at an Arab-American community center in Chicago, one of half a dozen incidents under investigation by the city's hate crime unit.

Six bullets were fired at a suburban Dallas Muslim center, and vandals defaced a mosque in the Virginia suburbs of the nation's capital with obscene graffiti. In northern Indiana, gunmen shot up Arab-owned gas

stations and damaged a Jordanian restaurant. In San Francisco someone left a bag filled with pig's blood on the doorstep of an Islamic community center. In Alabama, women in traditional Islamic garments were jeered and spat upon.

In the Detroit area, home to one of the largest concentrations of Arab-Americans, windows at the Muslim Students Association at Wayne State University were broken and several businesses and schools have received bomb threats.

Anti-Arab attacks have not been limited to the US. In Brisbane, Australia, a school bus carrying Muslim children was pelted with stones and bottles.

Trying to disassociate the government from racist attacks on Arabs and Muslims, President Bush and other US officials have issued public statements urging tolerance. But these remonstrations ring hollow. Government officials and media executives were well aware that their efforts to create a patriotic frenzy against Islamic terrorists would generate attacks on the Arab and Muslim population in the US. This was the case in the aftermath of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, as well as the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, when hundreds of such assaults were carried out.

Moreover, Arab-Americans and other immigrants have been singled out for detention and harassment by federal and local police agencies, simply on account of their appearance and nationality. In a number of cases the national media, without any substantiation, have claimed those arrested were linked to the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

On Thursday evening the television networks broadcast lurid reports that the FBI had arrested more than a dozen individuals at New York's John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia airports. It was said the arrests

had preempted new suicide hijackings like those that destroyed the World Trade Center and damaged the Pentagon on Tuesday.

TV anchors reported breathlessly that the detainees, all of Middle Eastern descent, were carrying knives, false IDs and certificates from the Florida flight training school attended by some of the suspects in Tuesday's hijackings. Film footage showed some of the detainees being led away by the police. The arrests were hailed as a victory in the newly declared war on terrorism and a vindication of the new security measures being implemented throughout the US.

By Friday morning, however, the networks were obliged to retract their accounts of the previous evening after an FBI spokesman announced that the news reports were false and none of those detained were carrying weapons or false IDs. No evidence was found in any way linking them to past or future terrorist acts, and all had been released except one, who was being held on an unrelated matter.

A federal official, acknowledging "there was no second wave of terrorism," said the arrests appeared to be the product of overreaction by authorities.

According to witnesses to the arrests, the police stormed an American Airlines flight at Kennedy Airport and singled out foreign-looking passengers for questioning. "Anyone with dark skin or who spoke with an accent was taken aside and searched," said passenger Mike Glass, 43, of Seattle. "And then they went to any male with too much facial hair," he added.

Earlier in the week the media widely publicized the arrest of a suspected accomplice of the hijackers who was traveling on an Amtrak train from Boston to Providence, Rhode Island. The man, who was apparently picked out because he was wearing a green turban, turned out to be an Indian Sikh and was later released.

These incidents underscore the media's complicity in creating a witch-hunt atmosphere against Arabs and other immigrants and aiding efforts to curtail civil liberties. The utterly false reportage of the episode at the New York airports, in particular, exposes the contempt for any journalistic standards of truth and accuracy that characterizes all of the media coverage since last Tuesday. The media function as organs of the government, disseminating its propaganda line with scant regard for the facts.

There is no reason to assume that any of the "news" emanating from the networks and the press is more reliable than the reports Thursday evening of a new wave of hijack attempts. Nothing dished out by the corporate-controlled media can be accepted at face value, especially under conditions of a concentrated campaign to stampede the public into a war frenzy.



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