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Letter to the Editor: Far from the truth: The obfuscation of Islamophobia and getting beyond irrational fears

By Letter to the Editor

Thursday, November 11, 2010

Print E-Mail

Professor Kathryn Fehrman in her Oct. 27 opinion editorial "[Juan Williams and the being of America](#)," *The Daily Transcript*, Oct. 28, addresses "politically correct America" citing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and "telling the truth" as valid reasons to profile Muslims on planes. She uses these reasons along with the memory of the tragedy of Sept. 11 to defend the obviously prejudiced remarks made by Juan Williams, who was recently fired from NPR because of them.

The problem with her analysis is that it only reinforces stereotyping and discrimination against the vast majority of Muslims, who are not extremists and who would never commit acts of terrorism. Fehrman regurgitated the claims that Juan Williams made on Fox about Muslims on a plane, "looking like the bad guys." Juan Williams though was very specific, saying Muslims "dressed in Muslim garb." When we look at the past and recent terrorist attacks both carried out and foiled in America however, none of them dressed in "Muslim garb."

Two examples come to mind to prove my point. The 9/11 hijackers wore western-style clothing and many of them were even clean-shaven. Fast-forward to the foiled "underwear bomber," Abdulmutalib was clean shaven, wore western clothes and if one were to just look at him based on appearance, one would generally think that he didn't "look" Muslim. If anything he could have passed as an African-American.

What is even more interesting is Juan Williams' response back in 1986 to Richard Cohen's article in the *Washington Post Magazine* that defended jewelry store owners who wouldn't buzz in young black men. His response appeared in the *New Republic* where he said, "Racism is a lazy man's substitute for using good judgment ... Common sense becomes racism when skin color becomes a formula for figuring out who is a danger to me." Apparently, Juan Williams failed to live up to his own standards.

A recent article from FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting) offers additional reflection on William's comments:

"... Williams needs to take a hard look at his comment about his fear of Muslims. If you feel fear every time you see someone getting on a plane in Muslim garb, then you have an irrational prejudice. Your worry about Muslim terrorists has extended to all Muslims in the same way that Americans during World War II distrusted all Japanese. Furthermore, it is irrational to believe that a Muslim terrorist would board an airplane looking Muslim at all. Williams is prejudiced against Muslims, and just can't see it. It doesn't matter that he went on to say that he's against any statements that would incite violence against Muslims. He's prejudiced and his comment offended Muslims."

So all this talk about "truth-telling" and accusing people of "political-correctness," when calling out prejudice, is but an obfuscation of the growing problem of Islamophobia in America. If we are to have an honest dialogue, it has to be without Islamophobic paranoia.

We should be cooling the fires of anti-Muslim sentiment in this country, not fueling it as Fehrman has done in defending Juan Williams.

-- Edgar Hopida, public relations director

Council on American-Islamic Relations, San Diego Chapter

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Jake
Excellent read!

4:05pm November 11, 2010

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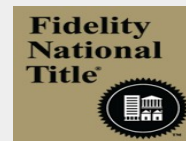
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