

The South Isn't Alone in its Islamophobia

A citizen can look in any direction on almost any day and find confirmation of two observations that have informed many of us who chronicle and comment on inter-group conflicts.

One is Else Frenkel-Brunswick's comment on the ethnocentric hater: "Even his hate is mobile and can be directed from one object to another."

The other is John Dewey's dictum that "people do not shoot because targets exist, but they set up targets in order that throwing and shooting may be more effective and significant."

Newcomers and "others" become objects of hate, throwing and shooting.

A [headline](#) in The Economist on Sept. 26 might suggest conflict in some largely Muslim country far away, who knows where: "Some stand with Ahmed."

Ahmed must be - the thought crosses the mind - a terrorist or some other threat to peace.

Uncross that instinctive surmise: he is meek Ahmed Mohamed, a 14-year-old precocious schoolboy inventor, who made the mistake of bringing a homemade clock to school in Irving, Texas.

He was handcuffed and led away by fearful and presumably hateful school officials who assumed that the clock must be a weapon of at least mini-mass destruction.

To counter the incident and reward the bright kid there was recompense: [an invitation to the White House](#), a fact that inspired more venom from people who for a long time have been targeting its most visible inhabitant.

Hate, for them, is mobile, and the act of shooting, they know, is more significant and satisfying if it has targets.

The Economist article's author next goes mobile and turns to Murfreesboro,

Tennessee, where a much more important conflict has been waged for some time, ever since an Islamic center opened there and faced threats which prompted a federal intervention after “one of the most egregious recent episodes of American Islamophobia.”

The author pointed to numerous other examples of suspicion and hate. A Tennessee sheriff is quoted as having defined Islam as “communism with a god.”

The south, we learn, is home to six of the 10 American states that have passed meaningless laws against the exercise of unexercised “Sharia Law.”

Authors of such stories have no difficulty piling on by piling up stories of similar incidents. But The Economist is not alone in issuing some legitimate qualifiers.

First, the South is not alone: Islamophobia is a national epidemic. Second, other kinds of ethnocentrism afflict other centers of “ethnics” of all sorts, to one or another of which we all are likely to be somehow linked.

More empathy for the moderately suspicious but more balanced citizens: Some Muslims have been recruited and become supporters of ISIS, the Taliban and other ominous groups and forces which can awaken fear in any sentient citizen.

Also necessarily overlooked in the nature of the case, or necessarily slighted in stories of conflict not consensus, is the fact that most Muslims in America are not potential terrorists and are as cautious as anyone else about ISIS-type threats or fanatics who are lone rangers on the American civil landscape.

Every year, more and more American non-Muslims awaken to the fact that their physician or nurse or community leader or merchant down the block is a practicing Muslim and a generous citizen who welcomes “the other” instead of counter-targeting them.

Islam as a faith community includes stories as frightening as the fierce stories of the God of Israel and, thus, of Christians, God who is received by followers as a loving motivator for good among those who can find meaning without setting up targets.

✘ *Martin E. Marty is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago. A [version](#) of this article first appeared on [Sightings](#), a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago*

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