

## **A CONVERSATION DONE AS READERS' THEATER ABOUT THE IMPACT OF 9/11 ON OUR COMMUNITY**

The terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C., and rural Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001 had an immediate and devastating impact on individuals, families and communities. Lives were lost, symbolic infrastructure was destroyed and around the country, Americans mourned and grappled with a sense of unparalleled vulnerability and fear. Unfortunately, the indirect consequences of the attacks continue to haunt America today. The attacks fueled changes in attitudes and policies concerning counter-terrorism, national security, civil liberties, and immigration that persist in isolating us from one another and fragmenting our country.

This play was created from *The 9/11 Report* by Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights which aims to illuminate the effects of 9/11 on the day-to-day lives of Minnesotans from a diverse array of refugee, immigrant, and religious minority communities through personal accounts from the five-year period following the 9/11 tragedy. Minnesota Advocates conducted 107 interviews of Minnesotans belonging to various immigrant, refugee, and religious minority groups. The interviewees represented a broad spectrum of income levels, educational backgrounds, legal statuses, employment statuses, religious affiliations, and countries of origin. Given that all of these experiences occurred in a group of just over 100 individuals who had virtually no connection to one another, these stories present a disturbing portrait of post-9/11 life in immigrant communities in Minnesota.

The conversations reflected in the play version are paraphrased from the report and creative liberties have been taken to make the play flow logically. It is important to remember that most of the experiences are based on the interviews. The number following the comment corresponds to the interview from which it was taken. This exercise is not meant to be comprehensive nor scientific. It is a tool to help students to understand the results that the post-9/11 climate has on real peoples' lives. We hope that by listening to these voices and by seeking out the voices of others, we are increasing the likelihood that future discussions about national security, civil liberties, and immigration will include recognition of the inherent human rights and dignity of all people.

Vocabulary to review before the activity: hijab, Sikh

Divide students randomly into three groups. They can sit in a circle and read the parts corresponding in order around the circle. A few of the parts are gender specific, so if students want to skip ahead on those occasions to have the gender of the reader correspond to the part they may do so.

- **Group 1** will be the Muslim community. This group has the most parts, so it should be the largest.
- **Group 2** are Immigrants or Religious minorities who are not Muslim
- **Group 3** are members of the majority community.

**Everyone from Group 1 reads together:** *9/11 was a day when 19 people cast a cloud over 1.5 billion people that 300 million people can't see through. 020:3*

**Group 3:** What do you mean? 9-11 just proved that certain people don't like Americans. We just need to be extra careful to check out people who might be terrorists. People who aren't terrorists don't have anything to be afraid of.

\* **Group 1:** We were scared to send our children to school.

\* **Group 1:** My mother chose to stay indoors post-9/11. She would not go to the grocery store.

\* **Group 1:** After 9/11, a lot of us stopped going out at night because we were scared.

\* **Group 2:** It wasn't just Muslims or Arabs that felt afraid. I'm Cambodian. I came to Rochester in the 1980's, and right after 9/11, it was not safe to go out late. I was afraid that people would take out their anger on anyone who looks different. I stayed in the house. When I walked, people would look at me. I kept thinking that they hated me.

\* **Group 2:** As an immigrant from Latin America, I only feel safe at church, not even at home.

\* **Group 2 (male):** I am Sikh, not Muslim, but as a part of my religion I wear a turban. I was at a mall and these high school students started shouting and pointing at me...

\* **Group 3:** Look, there is an Iraqi!.

**Group 3:** We were all scared though. The Twin Towers had just been bombed. It's one thing to be afraid, but did anybody actually DO anything to you?

\* **Group 1:** I was just filling up my car with gas, and suddenly someone said,

\* **Group 3:** Where are you from? Why are you here?

\* **Group 1:** That's like what happened to me. I had just finished putting gas in my car when someone came out of the gas station and SPIT at me!

\* **Group 1:** A few months after 9/11, I was at McDonald's with my two kids. Suddenly this other customer came up to me...

\* **Group 3:** You People! You Did it. You attacked this country. It's all your fault that all those people died on 9-11. It's you and all the other Muslims. We never should have let any of you into this country!

\* **Group 3:** Hey, hey. Wait a second. You can't be picking on them. They didn't do anything. You can't blame a whole religion for what 11 people did. You just need to settle down. How about you just leave them alone and go home. Come on. It's time to go now.

\* **Group 3:** I'm so sorry that you were treated so mean. No one should talk like that to you and your kids. I'm really sorry.

\* **Group 1:** When I first came to this country, they told me I would be safe.

**Group 3:** Still a guy like that is probably crazy. Most people know that **all** Muslims not are responsible for what a few individuals did.

\* **Group 2:** Based on my experience as a Hindu from India, I wouldn't be so sure. I had helped my friend who had gotten her car towed. I asked the towing company for a receipt which they refused to give me saying,

\* **Group 3:** Not until you give me the receipt for the World Trade Center!

\* **Group 1:** On 9/11 someone left a message that said,

\* **Group 3:** Hello. I'm calling from the camp of Osama Bin Laden.

\* **Group 1:** It was a person from here. What are the chances the caller would randomly pick me? I called the police who came, listened to the message and said ...

\* **Group 3:** Just let him go. He was just drunk.

\* **Group 1:** Right after 9/11, at the Arab Student Association at the University of Minnesota there were messages left on the answering machine.

\* **Group 3:** “Go back to your country!”<sup>1</sup>

\* **Group 1:** On top of that, the FBI questioned several of our members, mostly students from Saudi Arabia. So, a lot of people quit the student group.

\* **Group 1:** At my college, Arab students received threatening mail and the school investigated it, but not really, so they never figured out who did it.

\* **Group 3:** Hello, Police Department, How may I help you?

\* **Group 1:** Hello, our organization has been getting harassing phone calls for months.

\* **Group 3:** I’m afraid we can’t technically classify the calls as threats so we will be unable to take official action against the callers.

\* **Group 1:** An elder in the Somali community, here, Ali W. Ali, died nine days after being punched in the head while standing at a bus stop in Minneapolis on October 15, 2001. The assailant has not been found.

\* **Group 1:** I remember when that happened. Actually, a lot of people say the media was partially responsible for that incident. The Minneapolis *Star Tribune* ran a front-page article the day before Mr. Ali’s attack. The article was about a supposed connection between a terror group and Somalis who used money-lending services in Minnesota.<sup>2</sup> Of course it is still not entirely clear why Mr. Ali was attacked or whether it was related to 9/11, but the press coverage certainly created anger against the Somali community.<sup>3</sup>

\* **Group 1:** The media does make it so much worse. They push an image of a hostile, ready-to-die, fanatic religion. They link extremists with fundamentalists with Islamists with suicide bombers. This makes people have an image in their mind. When they see someone who might fit the profile, they remember the hostile image.

\* **Group 2:** I saw on the Sikh Coalition website about a Sikh woman who was going to her car after grocery shopping. Three men approached her from behind and pushed her up against her car. One of them punched her in the stomach, elbowed her in the back, saying ...

\* **Group 3:** That’s what you people deserve.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Patty Marsicano, *A Changed Climate* (Minn. Pub. Radio broadcast Sept. 17, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Greg Gordon, *Terror Group May Have Received Local Funds: Some Minnesota Somalis Thought Al-Itihaad Was a Charity*, STAR TRIB. (Minneapolis, Minn.), Oct. 14, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Kate Parry, *Newspaper Needs to Improve Coverage of Minnesota Somalis*, STAR TRIB. (Minneapolis, Minn.), Jan 24, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> SIKH COALITION, BIAS INCIDENTS, <http://www.sikhcoalition.org/hatecrime.asp?mainaction=viewreport&reportid=74.>]

\* **Group 2:** They say she reported the crime to the police and the woman left Minnesota soon after.

\* **Group 2:** The assault on that lady was one of the first things I was told about the Sikh community in Minnesota when I moved to the Twin Cities from the East Coast in 2003.

**Group 3:** I understand why she would have left. It would be hard to feel welcome here if you worried people were going to treat you like that.

**Group 3:** It's unfortunate. It really is, but there has always been discrimination in the U.S. How is this anything new since 9/11?

\* **Group 2:** Before 9/11 people were racist, and it was nothing new. Post-9/11, there is permission to insult.

\* **Group 1:** Definitely, there was anti-Muslim sentiment pre-9/11, but it was not politically correct to voice such views. People had to be tolerant. Now, after September 11, it opened the floodgates. It came out. It is OK to discriminate. That was the aftermath.

\* **Group 1:** We had to get a restraining order against our neighbor who threw pork in our backyard.

\* **Group 3:** You terrorists! Stay off my land, you Muslims!

\* **Group 1:** We called the police, and they came and talked to him, but the problems kept happening. The police suggested that we get an order for protection. It got to the point where it was dangerous. We had mail that was opened. We also got a letter telling us to move. One day, the neighbor came into our yard.

\* **Group 3:** Stay off the Christian side you Muslims!

\* **Group 1:** We got an order of protection. I was in total panic mode. I would wonder: Can the police get here fast enough? One day the neighbor had guests over who were looking through the fence.

\* **Group 3:** There's the terrorist. There's the terrorist. There's the terrorist.

\* **Group 3:** You're under arrest for the violation of the protection order.

\* **Group 3:** Your neighbors whom you victimized have decided not to go to trial. Instead you will have to pay a fine and write an essay about diversity. 002:5

\* **Group 2:** I'd be curious to read the essay. Hopefully it forced him to really think about what he did.

\* **Group 1:** A couple was driving on Central Avenue in Minneapolis. While at a traffic light, the driver of another car got out, removed the husband and severely beat him. I think that the attacker was angry when he saw the wife's hijab<sup>5</sup>. The wife jumped out of the car and tried to help her husband. Other drivers witnessed the beating, but no one stopped to intervene. The husband suffered brain damage. The guy who did it was sentenced only to community service.

\* **Group 3:** Only community service?!

\* **Group 1:** I hear the wife stopped wearing the hijab and that she is in fear everywhere she goes.

\* **Group 1:** My uncle owns a store in St. Cloud. It closes at 11 p.m. On his way home he saw graffiti that said, "Get out of St. Cloud." It happened twice. The third time there was smashed eggs in front of the store.<sup>6</sup>

\* **Group 3:** The community and the police force, we did our best to support him. We told him, "Stay there and keep up the good work."

\* **Group 1:** It has gotten better for him, but it is very hard to have a business in St. Cloud.

\* **Group 1:** I used to own a restaurant near the University. The harassment we faced was horrendous in the months after 9/11. A group of people came into the restaurant and told us ...

\* **Group 3:** Display your innocence.

\* **Group 3:** Give us Bin Laden or die.

\* **Group 1:** Two months after 9/11, someone came into the restaurant and said they had a gift. It was an American flag full of blood. We closed the restaurant permanently less than eight months after 9/11.

**Group 3:** Has it died down though? 9/11 is over 5 years ago?

\* **Group 1:** The shed outside the mosque in Columbia Heights was burned in an arson attempt in October 2004.

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<sup>5</sup> Hijab is the word used in the Islamic context for the practice of dressing modestly. Opinions on what exactly constitutes hijab vary among Muslims. Throughout this report Minnesota Advocates will refer to "hijab" to mean a headscarf worn today by many Muslim women in Minnesota and around the world.

<sup>6</sup> Kelly Scott, *Vandalized Businesses' Owners Welcome Support*, ST. CLOUD TIMES, (St. Cloud, Minn.), Dec. 18, 2002; Kate Kompas, *Vandals Deface Two Minority Businesses*, ST. CLOUD TIMES, (St. Cloud, Minn.), Dec. 17, 2002.

\* **Group 1:** And the paintballs shot at the Islamic Center of Minnesota in Fridley, and rotten eggs were thrown at worshippers in Columbia Heights.<sup>7</sup> That happened in 2004 too. There is a three-year gap, but we make a strong argument that it is related to 9/11.

\* **Group 1:** People tend to interlink world events. When there are bombs in Iraq, that is an extension of 9/11. People feed off other world events.

**Group 2:** These hateful incidents are still happening to immigrants from a variety of backgrounds. Sure you can't prove that it is directly related to 9/11, but the discrimination is affecting many people who are seen as outsiders or different.

**Group 2:** Listen to Trang's story. It will make you so sad. Trang's family came from Vietnam. Go ahead Trang. Tell them what happened.

\* **Group 2:** In 2002, my dad passed away. He fell through the ice while he was ice fishing with my brothers. My 10 year old brother was trying to get help. My brother and cousin were two miles away from shore. They came across a white man fishing. The boys were crying, "Help my dad." But the white guy said,

\* **Group 3:** You Asian people deserve to die!

**Group 3:** That's horrible! And by the time the boys got help from someone else your father had died. Please try to understand that we're not all cruel. Very few people feel that way about Asian immigrants or Muslims. Please don't hate all of us for what a few ignorant or angry people have done.

**Everyone from Group 2:** *We agree! No one should blame an entire group for the actions of isolated individuals!*

\* **Group 3:** The Department of Homeland Security has a mandate to better protect the United States. We will prevent terrorist attacks. To do so the FBI has to be aggressive.

\* **Group 1:** I don't think most people understand how innocent people are being treated. My friend who is also Pakistani and goes to St. Cloud state was taken by the F.B.I on September 12, 2001. For one year, nobody knew where he was. He had a court hearing, and they could not prove that he had any involvement in 9/11. He was released."

\* **Group 1:** I work for a school district in the Twin Cities. The FBI came to my home the day after I had looked into renting a bus for a school event.

\* **Group 3:** Why do you need the buses?

\* **Group 3:** Where is the group going?

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Carlson, *Muslims Fear Crime: Weekend Fire Latest Example of Vandalism Targeting Community*, PIONEER PRESS (St. Paul, Minn.), Oct. 4, 2004, at 1 & 5B; Chao Xiong, *Twin Cities' Muslims Detail Vandalism Attacks*, STAR TRIB. (Minneapolis, Minn.), Oct. 4, 2004.

\* **Group 3:** What organization do you represent?

\* **Group 3:** What do you think of Saddam Hussein?

\* **Group 3:** What do you think of Osama Bin Ladin?

\* **Group 3:** What mosque do you go to?.

**Group 3:** That does sound pretty unreasonable to ask questions like that?

\* **Group 3:** I disagree. After all, it wasn't Eskimos who hijacked those planes.

\* **Group 3:** It's true. These people just need to realize that things have changed.

**Group 2:** Things have changed, but we can't resort to racial profiling.

**Group 3:** Profiling? What's that?

**Group 1:** Racial profiling. Assuming someone is suspicious because of race, dress, religion, an accent. That's what they do to Muslims in the airport.

\* **Group 1:** I am always stopped by a random check.

\* **Group 1:** Shortly after 9/11 I was held in an airport in California for three days. Now, delays of one or two days are still "normal" for me and other Muslim students.

**Group 3:** But profiling doesn't just happen for air travel. Now it's like it's a crime to drive while Muslim!

**Group 2:** In routine law enforcement decisions, such as deciding which motorists to stop for traffic infractions—consideration of the driver's race or ethnicity is absolutely forbidden.

\* **Group 1:** Woah! Don't get us started. I've been stopped 40 times since September 11. Every time the Department of Homeland Security raises the alert from yellow to orange, I get pulled over more. If the cops see a Muslim with a beard, they have to stop. The police claim they are pulling me over for reckless driving, driving while talking on my cell phone, speeding, failing to use a signal, signaling too late and to check my driver's license.

\* **Group 2:** Sí señor. No doubt about it. You are more likely to get stopped if you are brown."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Latinos were stopped at nearly twice the expected rate." INST. ON RACE & POVERTY, COUNCIL ON CRIME & JUSTICE, MINNESOTA STATEWIDE RACIAL PROFILING REPORT: ROCHESTER 1 (2003), <http://www.irpumn.org/uls/resources/projects/Rochester-final.pdf>.

**Group 2:** On top of that, post 9/11 in Minnesota they passed regulations that make it illegal for undocumented people to get a driver's license. So with no license, they can't get insurance. But people still end up driving – how else are you going to get to your job, especially out in the suburbs?

\* **Group 1 (woman)** Race and ethnicity get us profiled but so does religious dress. I wear a hijab. Once in the mall after 9/11 I was looking at the perfume. My husband noticed that a sales clerk was following us. She was about five feet behind us, and every time we moved, she followed.

\* **Group 3:** Why didn't you file a complaint with the store manager?

\* **Group 1:** In stores it's not that uncommon to be followed.

\* **Group 1: (woman)** It seems like after 9/11, those who used to wear hijab have stopped wearing it. I didn't, but I know a lot who stopped wearing it out of fear.

**Group 3:** Pardon me for saying so, but it seems that new immigrants want everything to be done their way. They came to our country, not the other way around. They should not expect to have everything their way.

**Group 3:** What do you mean? The whole system is set up to be on a Christian calendar. Think of our holidays, even our weekends to have off for church. And nobody blinks an eye if someone wears a cross as jewelry, but if a Muslim woman wears a head covering as part of her religion, they say that's a problem.

\* **Group 3:** I think the immigrants are getting special privileges. Somali children pray during school but Catholic students do not have special rooms for prayer during school time. Immigrant students receive privileges like ESL. Somali students are also able to wear scarves while Caucasian students cannot wear baseball caps.

**Group 3:** Accommodating differences so that newcomers can integrate successfully in school or work is not a "special privilege."

**Group 2:** Why are we all so worried that another group is going to get something more than our group. Shouldn't we want the best for everyone?

**Group 3:** I want the best for everyone. I want to understand more about how 9/11 has affected ordinary people who are Muslims, immigrants or religious minorities.

\* **Group 3:** I work helping to resettle refugees. I know that 9/11 has made the process for refugees to come to the U.S. take much longer. There was a family I was working with who was scheduled to fly out of Nairobi, Kenya, on September 13, 2001. Four years later they were still stuck in Kenya.

\* **Group 1:** I think that after 9/11 it was harder to find a job as a Muslim. Interview after interview I just wanted someone to look at my résumé. I would start to resent the questions and the need to state my position on Afghanistan. At a job interview during law school I was asked ....

\* **Group 3:** Do you know where Osama is?

**Group 3:** How can we know that these just aren't isolated incidents?

**Group 2:** The Minnesota Department of Human Rights reports that charges of discrimination based on religion have increased 82% since 9/11.

**Group 2:** And discrimination charges based on national origin have increased 45% and those based on race have increased 5% since 9/11.<sup>9</sup>

**Group 3:** I agree that this discrimination is not right. But if you don't speak up, nothing will change. What is the Muslim community doing to change the system?

\* **Group 1:** In the Arab community here there is real concern about having to be careful about what you say. A lot of people are now LESS involved. People have a tendency to put up their American flag and shut up.

\* **Group 1:** Many people in the Arab community feel that the government listens to our phone calls. There is mistrust. I'm sure they are watching."<sup>10</sup>

**Group 3:** Are you more loyal to the United States or to the Middle East?

\* **Group 1:** Since 9/11 people assumed my country of origin depending on what country we were bombing. Before 9/11 they thought Somali, immediately after 9/11 - Palestinian, and when the U.S. was bombing Afghanistan, I must be Afghani. None of these are correct. I am from the United States.

\* **Group 1:** I came from Ethiopia thirty years ago. I am still considered a foreigner here. I have been here longer than many other people. When twenty-two-year-olds look at me in a strange way, it is really something. They were not even born when I came here.

\* **Group 1:** Most of us thought this was the place to start over and that we were going to stay here until we died, but now we realize this will never be our home.

\* **Group 1:** Every year I try to belong. Minnesota is my home.

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<sup>9</sup> Minn. Dep't of Human Rights, *Bringing Human Rights Home to Minnesota: Trends in Race, National Origin, and Religious Discrimination*, Address at Human Rights Day at the University of Minnesota Law School (Dec. 9, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> See Lowell Bergman *et al.*, *Spy Agency Data After Sept. 11 Led F.B.I. to Dead Ends*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 17, 2006.

**Group 3:** Where are you from?

\* **Group 2:** I'm from Sartell, Minnesota.

**Group 3:** But, what **country** are you from?

\* **Group 2:** I am a seventh generation American. I was born and raised in the U.S. But people look at me as a Latino/Mexicano and not as part of the country.

\* **Group 2:** Since 9/11, I feel like I must be a model citizen, like if I don't cut my grass and weed my garden, my kids and I will be seen as "dirty Mexicans."

\* **Group 3:** Where did you learn to speak English so good?

\* **Group 2:** I learned to speak English 'well' in school in the **United States**.

\* **Group 2:** We should look for the ways that we are alike rather than different.

\* **Group 3:** Our communities need to look at ourselves in different ways and to recognize the importance and necessity of diversity.

\* **Group 1:** 9/11 sent a warning. We need to build bridges of understanding as communities or we will break apart in prejudice.

\* **Group 3:** It could help to educate people about the cultures of Muslims, other religious minorities, and immigrants. When we give talks about other cultures, people are interested.

\* **Group 1:** I think there are several responsibilities post-9/11: the non-Muslim needs to get educated, and the Muslims, if they hear something that is not true, need to correct them.

\* **Group 1:** From the ashes can come the domain of peace. It is tragic that people died on 9/11 the way they did. But now we know more about each other. We need to communicate. We need tolerance on all sides in this matter.

### **Questions for Discussion After the Play**

1. How did you feel to be in the group that you were in?
2. Which parts were the most shocking or memorable?
3. Was there anything that you disagree with or think should be added?
4. Were you able to relate to anything in particular said during the play? If you choose, share how your experiences are similar to or different from those of people who spoke during the play.
5. The experiences ranged from small incidents like looks or prank phone calls to hate crimes. Is it important to include such a wide range? Why?

6. What differences were there in the statements made by members of the majority group (Group 3)? Is the variety of opinions reflective of the those in the majority?
7. What compromises do you think should be made to ensure that the nation is secure?
8. Why could a play like this be controversial?
9. What other voices should be heard to understand this issue better? What about other issues?
10. The play ended with several suggestions for creating better understanding. Can you suggest others?
11. How does knowing that the play is based on interviews conducted in Minnesota affect your opinion of the issue?