

Misjudged Muslims

Mustafa Elhoussein
The Washington Times,
Dec. 17, 2000; p. B4

Much has been written and said in recent days about the Hillary Clinton campaign returning checks of the former executive director of the American Muslim Council, Abdurahman Alamoudi. This is further evidence, we are told, that Muslims have been systematically excluded from the political process by those who wish to maintain a monopoly over political power.

Several top American journalists and pundits, such as columnist Richard Cohen and ABC Commentator George Stephanopoulos, have suggested that only a few, renegade members of these groups have expressed hatred toward the U.S. and support for Middle East terrorist groups, such as Hamas and Hezbollah. They argue that these Muslim organizations have been unjustly blamed for the foolish acts of a few of their members.

As a Muslim and secretary of the IbnKaldun Society, an Islamic cultural organization, I have a very different perspective, one that I believe is shared by the majority of Muslims in the U.S. Many of us in the Muslim community have been continually frustrated by self-appointed leaders who spew hatred toward America and the West and yet claim to be the legitimate spokespersons for the American Muslim community. These groups openly sympathize with Hamas, which the State Department has labeled a terrorist groups, and Hezbollah, a Shiite group responsible for acts such as the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut.

Most Muslims, if they have even heard of the American Muslim Council, the Council for American Islamic Relations, Muslim Public Affairs Council, and other such Islamist groups, regard these self-appointed spokesmen as impostors. Indeed, there is a great deal of bitterness that such groups have tarnished the reputation of mainstream Muslims, who do not share their sympathies with Middle East terrorist groups.

Like other immigrant groups, most Muslims want to avail themselves of the opportunities that America has to offer and want nothing to do with these hateful, radical ideologies.

Just a few weeks ago, Mr. Alamoudi, the leading figure of the American Muslim Council since its inception in 1991, used the occasion of a demonstration in front of the White House to exclaim "Hear that Bill Clinton...we are all supporters of Hamas...I wish they added that I am also a supporter of Hezbollah."

With such "leaders" at the helm, it is no wonder that things took an ugly turn when, at one DC demonstration over the situation in the Middle East, participants began to shout "Khaibar, Khaibar ya Yahud" or "Slaughter the Jews." Such calls are totally at odds with our tradition and a shameful violation of the standards of behavior toward other religions codified in the Koran. We Muslims consider Jews and Christians as spiritual kin, our Holy Book calls them "People of the Book."

When confronted with rifts in the Muslim community, Americans naturally assume that such divisions are similar to the tensions existing between various churches or denominations within the Christian and Jewish communities. But schisms in the Muslim community today belong to a very different category. They are between mainstream Muslim immigrants who come to these shores to embrace America, and those who front for a radical political movement, referred to as Islamists. Such groups should not only be kept at arms length from the political process, they should be actively opposed as extremists.

Those in the media who decry the bias against Muslims are not doing mainstream Muslims any favors. They should look at the record of statements of those Islamist leaders and label them the hate-mongers that they are. Only then will we hear the authentic and moderate voice of the American Muslim community.

Mustafa Elhussein is a lawyer and secretary of the IbnKhaldun Society, an Islamic cultural association -