

UNIT 6: BEING MUSLIM IN NEW YORK AFTER 9/11

SEPTEMBER 11th

personal stories

of transformation

MOHAMMAD RAZVI is the Executive Director and Founder of Council of Peoples Organization (COPO). He was born in Pakistan and emigrated with his parents to the United States when he was six years old. Following the attacks of September 11th, Mohammad founded COPO to help Arabs, South Asians and Muslims in New York City with the backlash they were experiencing. Today, COPO continues to support, empower, and educate these communities and help them strengthen bonds with their larger multi-cultural city and beyond.

“People were afraid to come forward. The community itself was living in fear. Fear from our fellow Americans.”



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TOPICS THIS STORY CONNECTS TO:

- **Helping a community to advocate for itself**
- Merging Muslim and American identities, embracing diversity
- Civic engagement, importance of the participation of ethnic and religious minorities in civil service, government, and law enforcement
- September 11th resulted in increased interfaith dialogue and increased interest in understanding religions

DEFINITIONS

A **hate crime** is a crime in which the perpetrator targets a victim based on his or her affiliation with a certain group, usually defined by race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality or ethnicity.

Islam in Arabic means the voluntary surrender to The Almighty God (*Allah*). The religion is focused around the holy book *Qur'an*, which promotes peaceful, non-violent resolution to conflict. **Islam** is second to Christianity in the number of followers worldwide. The 1.2 billion people who practice Islam are called **Muslims**.

Terrorism is the use of violence against civilians with the intent to cause fear or panic. **Terrorists** commit violent acts to bring attention to their cause.

South Asian refers to people from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and The Maldives.

A **social service agency** is an organization that through programming and other opportunities seeks to improve the life and living conditions of members of a community.

Non-profit organization is an organization that uses its profits solely to continue the pursuit of its mission and goals. Most **non-profit organizations** engage in community, cultural or artistic work.

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BACK STORY BIOGRAPHY

Mohammad Razvi is the Executive Director and founder of the Council of Peoples Organization (COPO), based in Brooklyn, New York. Mohammad, a Muslim born in Pakistan, emigrated with his family to the United States when he was six years old. He grew up in a community that had very few South Asians, but contained many other families who had also come from other countries in search of the American dream. When Mohammad grew up, he joined his father in developing businesses needed by the Pakistani community in Brooklyn. Together they opened one of the first Pakistani grocery stores in the neighborhood. The store became a place where people felt comfortable, and as Mohammad says, it was one of the first “social service agencies” in the community. If someone didn’t have cash, the store allowed them to take food on credit. Mohammad and his father were often sought after for advice on cross-cultural issues, such as how to handle a problem with a child in school. After the attacks of September 11th, many people in the Pakistani community came to Mohammad and his father with a different kind of request. Men in their families had been picked up by the FBI because the U.S. government was trying to find anyone living here who might have ties to terrorist activity. Mohammad approached the FBI and elected officials and asked why they were picking up people and what the charges were. He acted as an intermediary between families and government agencies.

Mohammad realized that his community needed to strengthen its ties to the larger New York community in a variety of ways. He formed COPO, a non-profit organization, to provide legal assistance, English language classes for adults, and afterschool programs for children. On the first day the organization offered the English classes, 300 people signed up. Meanwhile, stores on the block were being vandalized, and people were calling Pakistanis and other South Asians “terrorists.” Parents coming into COPO’s classes began talking about their children’s experiences of being bullied in school. Since many people in this community dress similarly to people from Muslim countries, they were targeted by people who misplaced their anger at the terrorists. Mohammad worked with the Mayor’s Office, the NYC Commission on Human Rights and other groups to develop a discrimination survey to assess the types of harassment experienced by Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in New York City. He continues to build bridges between his community and other religious and ethnic communities in New York City with the belief that when people better understand each other, they can then respect each other, prevent further violence and live in harmony.



I. WATCH PART 1.

II. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

Mohammad responded to the needs of people in his community after September 11th. How will Mohammad build understanding among different groups?

III. WATCH PART 2 TO FIND OUT HOW MOHAMMAD HELPED HIS COMMUNITY.

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IV. CONNECT AND REFLECT ACTIVITY

1. Fact: On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Navy deployed aerial attacks on the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. As a result from 1942-1945, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes, schools, and businesses and were relocated to detention centers administered by the U.S. government.

Personal Experience Question: How does this history relate to the experiences of South Asians, Arabs and Muslims in America right after September 11th? Can you identify another period in history in which a group was unfairly targeted?

2. Fact: The hijackers were Islamic extremists who performed this act of terror in the name of Islam, despite the fact that the Qur'an and other Muslim texts promote tolerance and respect for other religions and emphasize the value of human life. Following September 11th, there was a backlash of attacks ranging from bullying and harassment to acts of violence on Muslim, Arab and South Asian communities across the United States. The actions of the hijackers in the name of Islam negatively affected thousands of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians who do not support such violence.

Personal Experience Question: When people in Mohammad's community started to come forward with problems of discrimination and hate crimes, what did he do? Why do you think people who experienced discrimination were afraid to come forward initially?

3. Fact: As a result of the backlash against Muslims, Arabs and South Asians after September 11th, many members of those communities became more civically engaged, interacting with government agencies and other organizations to advocate for themselves.

Personal Experience Question: How did Mohammad help his community become more civically involved? What organizations did he work with in order to advocate for his community, which was experiencing prejudice and discrimination?

4. Fact: Despite the backlash against Muslims, Arabs and South Asians after September 11th, many people in these communities maintain their commitment to the practices of their faith and remain proud of their ethnic identity. Young people have expressed more interest in understanding their cultural heritage while celebrating and exercising their status as Americans and participating in their U.S. constitutional democracy.

Personal Experience Question: What did Mohammad mean by the statement, "I literally had to call myself 'Moe' in order to get help and services for these community members"? Why did he later return to using his full name, Mohammad? Why do you think he found it difficult to identify himself as both Muslim and American at the same time? How do you identify yourself?

5. Fact: The events of September 11th were simultaneously witnessed by people around the world who shared in the grief of the United States. The attacks inspired a sense of solidarity across lines of race, religion, and nationality. While our world continues to struggle in the search for peace, this spirit of tolerance can still be found in organizations, many of which were formed in response to the attacks.

Personal Experience Question: Mohammad discusses the diversity of his staff at the COPO office and the importance of exposing his community to people of other ethnic and religious backgrounds. What are the benefits of people becoming familiar with a variety of cultures and religions? In what ways do you come into contact with cultures or religions different from your own on a daily basis? How do these encounters have a positive effect on you?

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V. SPECIFIC RESEARCH RESOURCES

■ *Face to Face, Independent Television Service*

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, people of Japanese ancestry living in the United States were subjected to discrimination with nearly 120,000 people being forced into internment camps. Following the attacks of September 11th, Arab, Muslim, and South Asian Americans were confronted with similar acts of hatred, distrust and discrimination. www.itvs.org/facetoface

■ *9.11 Moments, Independent Television Service*

“How has your life changed after September 11?” 34 short videos by 9 independent producers capture timely and heartfelt reactions to the tragedy that shook the world. www.itvs.org/9.11

■ *Council of Peoples Organization*

Mohammad Razvi’s organization came into being in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy. COPO opened its doors on February 1, 2002 to respond to the crisis facing some communities in the U.S. <http://www.copousa.org/>

■ *Discrimination Against Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians in New York City Since 9/11, New York City Commission on Human Rights*

An analysis of surveys that focused on discrimination in Muslim, Arab and South Asian communities after the attacks of September 11th. http://www.nyc.gov/html/cchr/pdf/sur_report.pdf

■ *Five Common Myths About Islam, Global Exchange*

A list of five common myths about Islam and an explanation as to why each is not true. <http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/features/islam/islammyths.pdf>

VI. CLASSROOM & SERVICE PROJECTS

Share your projects with the Tribute Center and we will put them online for other teachers and students to learn about. Send your project descriptions to education@tributewtc.org

1. LOCAL SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

Mohammad comments that in many communities “Mom and Pop” shops are often the first means of social service for people. Is there a “Mom and Pop” shop in your community that also provides support and service for people? Describe it. Interview someone who works or volunteers there to find out how it helps people obtain the services that they need.

2. DEBUNKING STEREOTYPES AND BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH GLOBAL COLLABORATION

Tribute WTC Visitor Center has joined with iEARN (**International Education and Resource Network**) to support interaction and global collaborative project work with students around the world, including those in conflict situations like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. **Your class can participate in a web-based project that can help build global understanding.** Find out more about the project on the next page. If you register through the Tribute Center, there is no fee for participation in this program this year (March 2010–February 2011). All iEARN projects build bridges, improve education, and make a difference through direct student-to-student interaction in a safe and secure online “Collaboration Centre.”

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DEBUNKING STEREOTYPES AND BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH GLOBAL COLLABORATION

Two kinds of interaction and collaboration are possible in this project:

1. GENERAL ONLINE FORUM

iEARN can enable you and your students to interact directly with teachers and students throughout its 130-country network, including those in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This can be done by identifying schools from these countries that are active in iEARN's online discussion forums. In addition, there is an interactive database through which teachers can search for colleagues in these countries. Once you make the connection, you can introduce yourself and your class via the forums to explore possible areas of discussion that might be possible between your classes.

2. DEBUNKING STEREOTYPES

Participate with classes in multiple countries to examine the images and stereotypes that students have about other countries and to learn how their own country is perceived by students around the world. Through student interaction these stereotypes may be challenged. Classes from different countries join the project throughout the year. Currently students are participating from Algeria, Oman, the USA, Turkey, Kenya, Macedonia, Morocco, Brazil, Taiwan, Portugal, Azerbaijan, Yemen and other countries.

Project's Purpose: To build critical thinking skills, strengthen cross-cultural awareness, create ties of friendship, and increase understanding through a discussion among students of images and stereotypes about countries and cultures—both their own and others around the world.

Steps in the Breaking Stereotypes Project include:

1. Students in your class identify three stereotypes that they think students in other countries have about their own country.
2. Students discuss these possible stereotypes to see if they think that they are true. If they are not true, how would students share information about their country to create a more accurate image (break the stereotype) of their country.
3. Teachers ask students to think about and write down images of stereotypes that they have about the other participating countries.
4. Students share these stereotypes in the project's forum under the topic that has been created for posting stereotypes about various countries, using text, video, sound, or graphics/photos.
5. Students read the stereotypes that others have about their country and respond with thoughtful comments about them.
6. Students discuss in their classroom what they have learned about other countries and how they have shared information about their own culture that breaks stereotypes they have encountered among other students online.

Email education@tributewtc.org if you would like to register for this program.

