

Ahmed Mohamed, was arrested for bringing a homemade clock to school, the nation

When 14 year-old Irving MacArthur High School freshman,



witnessed evidence of the widespread fear of terrorism and

what that fear will make people do. So where's the line between safety and prejudice?

8:46 a.m., Sept. 11, 2001: American Airlines Flight 11 crashes into the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

10:25 a.m., Aug. 5, 2012: White supremacist Wade Michael Page shoots and kills six men and women worshipping at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

2:49 p.m., April 15, 2013: Two bombs go off just before the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three and injuring 264.

1:32 p.m., Dec. 24, 2013: U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejects Nicholas George's lawsuit against TSA officials at the Philadelphia International Airport who detained him for four hours because of the Arabic flashcards in his bag.

Early afternoon, Sept. 14, 2015: Ahmed Mohamed, a Muslim high school freshman, is handcuffed and pushed into an Irving police car after showing a homemade clock to his English teacher.

For 48 hours, nobody knows quite how to react. Then social media lights up. #IStandWithAhmed is suddenly trending across the globe. Thousands rally to his support over Twitter:

"White Christian kid makes a nuclear reactor? Genius. Brown Muslim kid makes a clock? Terrorist."

"If you were that concerned about it why didn't you evacuate the school?"

Others call him a false victim and a scammer.

"Would an innocent kid tweet about seeing his lawyer? Cretinous."

"If you 'build' a clock that looks like a bomb, sorry, but I'm going to think it's a bomb. We live in the era of ISIS."

The nation is divided, but one crucial question remains unanswered: when does self-preservation become Islamophobia?

Ahmed's arrest is just another example of the gray area.

For Muslims in America, in Texas and around campus, anti-Islamic sentiment isn't a distant and irrelevant phenomenon. It carries weight and makes an impact in their lives.

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If this was an actual bomb, wouldn't it have gone off in the hours before the police arrived?" sophomore Abdullah Akbar, a practicing Muslim, said. "They came hours later, and the bomb still hadn't gone off, and yet they still handcuffed and arrested Ahmed."

History instructor Myles Teasley, who lived in Morocco to study Arabic, echoes Akbar's sentiments.

"If they thought it was a bomb," Teasley said, "there should have been a bomb squad called and the school should have been evacuated. The school wasn't evacuated and the bomb squad wasn't called out, but the police were called and the kid was arrested."

Marcus Master Teacher Dr. Bruce Westrate agrees the incident was a misunderstanding in the first place, but stands by the teacher in reporting "anything that may possibly be of danger to the students," and argues more details and context are needed before a claim of discrimination can be made.

"If I saw this thing, I would have reported it," he said. "Yet immediately, everyone jumps to the conclusion that there is some nefarious motive here, that these people are racist, which is stupid. We are not talking about a race. We are talking about a religion."

Akbar, however, feels race was a definite aspect in turning the incident into a national hot-button issue.

"Think about St. Mark's," Akbar said. "I always see people holding boxes with wires for robotics or engineering, and no one ever calls them out. I feel like the fact that he was a Muslim, especially a Muslim with the name Ahmed Mohamed, immediately made his teacher's mind flash to, 'Oh, he must be a terrorist!'"

In contrast, Westrate and Teasley both believe that, regardless of the motive of Ahmed's arrest, it was a poorly handled situation that should have been contained within the school's grounds.

"The larger context is not even sought for, and that's the only way you can judge these things," Westrate said. "The response is just hare-brained."

Teasley feels the media also

holds much of the responsibility for the overblown proportions of the incident.

"This should never have gone to the national media," Teasley said. "No one should have known about it. A couple of miscommunicated steps and then a lot of media and national and social media involvement has made this a ridiculous situation that it should not have been."

Photography instructor and military officer Scott Hunt agrees with Teasley on the front of national media.

"Sadly, I'm afraid this may be another case of 'manufactured media outrage' driven by personal or political agendas," Hunt said. "In this day and age, major media

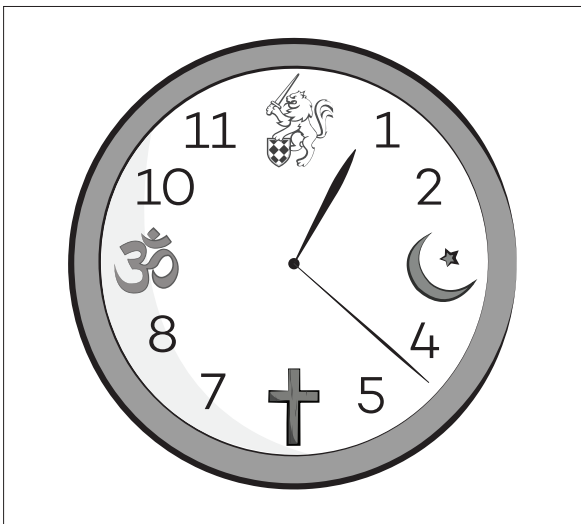
the ruthless beheading of journalist James Foley last year to the bombing of the Egyptian security agency just two months ago.

"The whole terrorist group's name is the Islamic State," Akbar said. "By portraying these terrorists as Islamic and having the core unit of Islam, it sort of equates Islam with terrorism."

With months living in Morocco, Teasley has seen how similar Muslims are to many cultures around the world, and is indignant that this relatable side of Arab people is never shown.

"No one wants to look at the people of the Middle East eating donuts and playing FIFA, which is most of them," Teasley said.

"They are showing ISIS over and



**TIMES ARE CHANGING** The cultural strife that grips the nation affects school communities, too.

outlets are turning to social media and reporting on trending topics without verifying the veracity of that topic."

Hunt feels that the accuracy of stories has often been compromised by the constant need for instantaneous news on the 24-hour cycle. He believes this is only worsened by the tendency of viewers to take the first word of the media as fact.

"Unfortunately, we may never know the full truth because the school district will likely never have the opportunity to defend itself or explain its decision publicly," Hunt said. "There are too many unanswered questions."

Regardless of the motive behind Ahmed's arrest, there is no denying that anti-Islamic sentiments are rising around the globe. The media is filled with images of the Islamic State's terror, from

over again. We only hear about the Muslims that are chopping people's faces off."

As a debater arguing against the growth of prejudiced domestic surveillance in the United States, Akbar is taking matters into his own hands. He strives to spread his views on the Islamophobia that has impacted him personally.

"Our debate coach gave me the O.K. for it," Akbar said, "and I started writing this narrative about my life and how, as a Muslim, I was treated in America, how the American surveillance policies on Muslims have affected my personal life."

Akbar will present his narrative during his major debates this season, with a goal of not just winning, but also leaving each of his opponents and judges a reminder of the individual ways

that a nationwide phenomenon has impacted local boys.

"What I hope is that my story can spread around and that can inspire other Muslims to spread their own stories, so that it can go through the community," Akbar said. "At least other people will have the opportunity to think about it and see both sides of the story, so you don't just see the Islamic State, you see actual Muslims in the United States also."

Chaplain Rev. Stephen Arbogast, who lived in Benin, Africa for four years and traveled around the world in the Peace Corps, believes exposure to the culture is an integral part of creating an environment free of anti-Islamic sentiment, but recognizes it may be difficult for the community at 10600 Preston Rd. to make a difference.

"It's very hard to understand how people think, and that's hard enough," Arbogast said. "And it's even harder to empathize with how people feel. That's hard enough even when you're talking to someone within your own culture, much less someone who has a very different way of looking at the world."

Yet as much as Arbogast stresses the need to reconcile differences, both he and Akbar recognize that similarities are equally important.

"It's time to publicize Muslim views and how Muslims are getting treated," Akbar said, "so the whole public can know that these guys are not just terrorists. They're not evil people or people who are trying to kill us. They have lives too, and they are just like us."

But for those who can't quite reconcile American culture with that of a foreign population, Arbogast urges understanding.

The first step to empathy is to understand where we remain apart, but the key is to stand together.

"I think it needs to be a higher priority that we go out and look for a mosque, a Muslim society, a Sufi order," Arbogast said. "Something that connects us with the society, and be willing to listen and watch and accept. Make it a higher priority, read history, read literature and go out and meet real live human beings in the community."

## What would you have done?

Teachers give their hypothetical reactions if faced with the same situation as the teacher at MacArthur High.



**SCOTT HUNT**

Photography instructor

Officer in the Texas State Guard

I may be in a unique situation in that I have received training and certification through my work with the Guard in the identification and function of various improvised explosive devices.

Based on this training and multiple photographs that I have seen of the 'clock,' I can say that I would have acted similarly to the school administration.



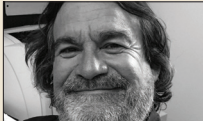
**GAYMARIE KURDI**

English instructor

Married to a Lebanese Muslim for 23 years

The nature of public schools lends themselves to being safety-paranoid because of school shootings and things like that, so I can understand the idea of the teacher wanting to keep people safe.

But my initial reaction would not necessarily be that the kid had brought a bomb just because he was Muslim.



**JORGE CORREA**

Spanish instructor

No prior knowledge of the events at MacArthur High

If it was a student who had [the device], I would never think of that. I would have thought it was a project. My first question would have been 'Can I play with this?' It's probably something fun.

Our environment here is so healthy, I wouldn't even go to the suspicion of thinking that it was something weird.



**DOUG RUMMEL**

Engineering instructor

Robotics sponsor

I would have been saying 'Oh, tell me more!' It's an engineering class. If I had any qualms about it, I would have put a note in there saying my name, signing it, and saying what it was, so they don't panic.

If you knew it was going to be an issue, if there was any question about it, you should have prepared for that.