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## In U.S., fear and distrust of Muslims runs deep

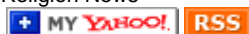
**REUTERS** 

Reuters Photo: Muslim men pray in Lafayette Park near the White House August 12, 2006. Roughly a...

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Long life is a blessing and a challenge

By Bernd Debusmann, Special Correspondent

Fri Dec 1, 9:05 AM ET

WASHINGTON (Reuters)- When radio host Jerry Klein suggested that all Muslims in the United States should be identified with a crescent-shape tattoo or a distinctive arm band, the phone lines jammed instantly.

The first caller to the station in Washington said that Klein must be "off his rocker." The second congratulated him and added: "Not only do you tattoo them in the middle of their forehead but you ship them out of this country ... they are here to kill us."

Another said that tattoos, armbands and other identifying markers such as crescent marks on driver's licenses, passports and birth certificates did not go far enough. "What good is identifying them?" he asked. "You have to set up encampments like during World War Two with the Japanese and Germans."

At the end of the one-hour show, rich with arguments on why visual identification of "the threat in our midst" would alleviate the public's fears, Klein revealed that he had staged a hoax. It drew out reactions that are not uncommon in post-9/11 America.

"I can't believe any of you are sick enough to have agreed for one second with anything I said," he told his audience on the AM station 630 WMAL (<http://www.wmal.com/>), which covers Washington, Northern Virginia and Maryland

"For me to suggest to tattoo marks on people's bodies, have them wear armbands, put a crescent moon on their driver's license on their passport or birth certificate is disgusting. It's beyond disgusting.

"Because basically what you just did was show me how the German people allowed what happened to the Jews to happen ... We need to separate them, we need to tattoo their arms, we need to make them wear the yellow Star of David, we need to put them in concentration camps, we basically just need to kill them all because they are dangerous."

The show aired on November 26, the Sunday after the Thanksgiving holiday, and Klein said in an interview afterwards he had been surprised by the response.

"The switchboard went from empty to totally jammed within minutes," said Klein. "There were plenty of callers angry with me, but there were plenty who agreed."

### POLLS SHOW WIDESPREAD ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT

Those in agreement are not a fringe minority: A Gallup poll this summer of more than 1,000

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Americans showed that 39 percent were in favor of requiring Muslims in the United States, including American citizens, to carry special identification.

Roughly a quarter of those polled said they would not want to live next door to a Muslim and a third thought that Muslims in the United States sympathized with al Qaeda, the extremist group behind the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington.

A poll carried out by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), an advocacy group, found that for one in three Americans, the word Islam triggers negative connotations such as "war," "hatred" and "terrorist." The war in [Iraq](#) has contributed to such perceptions.

#### TALK TO POWER



#### Hoyer responds

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Klein's show followed a week of heated discussions on talk radio, including his own, and online forums over an incident on November 22 involving six Muslim clerics. They were handcuffed and taken off a US Airways flight after passengers reported "suspicious behavior" that included praying in the departure gate area.

The clerics, on their way to a meeting of the North American Imams Federation, were detained in a holding cell, questioned by police and [FBI](#) agents, and released. Muslim community leaders saw the incident as yet more evidence of anti-Muslim prejudice.

#### IGNORANCE SEEN AS KEY PROBLEM

Several American Muslims interviewed on the subject of prejudice over the past few weeks said ignorance was at the core of the problem.

"The level of knowledge is very, very low," said Mohamed Esa, a U.S. Muslim of Arab descent who teaches a course on Islam at McDaniel College in Maryland. "There are 1.3 billion Muslims in the world and some people think they are all terrorists."

Hossam Ahmed, a retired Air Force Reserve colonel who occasionally leads prayer meetings for the small Muslim congregation at the [Pentagon](#), agreed. "Ignorance is the number one problem. Education is of the essence."

There are no hard figures on how many Muslims have been subject to harassment or prejudice and community leaders say that ugly incidents can prompt spontaneous expressions of support. Such as the e-mail a Minneapolis woman sent to CAIR after the imams were taken off their flight.

"I would like to ... help," the e-mail said. "While I cannot offer plane tickets, I would be happy to drive at least 2 or 3 of them. My car is small, but at least some of our hearts in this land of the free are large."

And optimists saw signs of change in the November 4 election of the first Muslim to the U.S. House of Representatives, which has 435 members.

Democrat Keith Ellison, a 43-year-old African-American lawyer, did not stress his religion during his campaign for a Minnesota seat, but said his victory would "signal to people who are not Muslims that Muslims have a lot to offer to the United States and the improvement of our country."

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