



Teachers Parents Kids Administrators Librarians Book Clubs Book Fairs

Search Site [input field] [search icon]

Where Teachers Come First

Resources & Tools

Strategies & Ideas

Student Activities Books & Authors Products & Services

Shop The Teacher Store

Storia™ eBooks

# The New York Times upfront The Newsmagazine For Teens

- HOME
- IN THIS ISSUE
- NEWS & TRENDS
- FEATURES
- TIMES PAST
- THE ETHICIST
- DEBATE
- TEEN VOICES
- UPFRONT TOPICS
- CONTACT US
- MAGAZINE INFO

Teacher Resources  
Digital Issues

## Is racial or religious profiling ever justified?

[Click here for RELATED ARTICLES & RESOURCES](#)

Ten years after 9/11, the U.S. is still trying to balance safety and security with protecting Constitutional freedoms

### YES

In the movie *Up in the Air*, the character played by George Clooney declares that he follows Asian travelers in airport security lines: "They pack light, travel efficiently, and they got a thing for slip-on shoes. God love 'em." He is admonished: "That's racist!" He responds: "I stereotype. It's faster."

Racial and religious profiling is no joke, but it also isn't necessarily racism, discrimination, or harassment. On issues of safety, profiling means making practical threat assessments. It's time that we, as a nation, ditch political correctness and choose pragmatism, recognizing that race, religion, and ethnicity can play an important role in criminality.

Since Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden issued a "declaration of war" against the U.S. in 1996, we've experienced several attacks and near misses, including the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C.; "shoebomber" Richard Reid; and the Christmas 2009 underwear bomber en route to Detroit. As a Muslim, I know most Muslims aren't terrorists, but sadly, the common denominator among these attackers is one thing: They're Muslim.

Profiling isn't just about Muslims, however. Depending on the situation, it might make sense to focus on Colombian gangsters carrying drugs or white supremacists targeting black churches. Profiling can be legal and rational. The Justice Department says that to prevent "catastrophic events" like airliner attacks, law-enforcement officials and airport screeners "may consider race, ethnicity, alienage", and other relevant factors." What it comes down to is that profiling can be one of our best defenses against the alternative: catastrophe.

**Asra Q. Noman**  
Author, *Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*

### NO

The issue of profiling is part of the ongoing national discussion about how to balance liberty and security in the post-9/11 era. First and foremost, racial and religious profiling is inconsistent with America's core constitutional principles of equality and fairness.

Despite the threats of crime and terrorism, we must not compromise on what we cherish and celebrate—the rule of law. Under American law, every person is innocent until proven guilty. When officials use profiling, they are indirectly blaming entire communities because a few among them have committed horrible crimes. Not only is that wrong, but it's also a waste of law-enforcement resources.

It's not just American Muslims who are affected by this. African-Americans have long complained that they are targeted for traffic stops in certain neighborhoods. That they are, in effect, suspects simply because of their race.

What's more, profiling isn't even effective. Among those who study this topic, there is a near-consensus that profiling is often counterproductive: Over the long term, it alienates entire communities whose cooperation is essential to the gathering of useful intelligence for crime fighting and counterterrorism. Take the example of Muslim Americans: Law enforcement officers urgently need their help in ferreting out threats, but that cooperation is less likely when law-abiding Muslims

