



ACLU EYE on the FBI:

The FBI's Use of Anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim Counterterrorism Training Materials



The ACLU has uncovered numerous FBI counterterrorism training materials that falsely and inappropriately portray Arab and Muslim communities as monolithic, alien, backward, violent and supporters of terrorism. Documents obtained through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit by the ACLU of Northern California and the Asian Law Caucus show that the use of these erroneous and biased materials spans from at least 2003 to 2011, and has been an integral part of [FBI training programs](#), despite recent efforts by the FBI to [minimize](#) the scope of this problem.

THE ACLU DOCUMENTS:

A 2003 [FBI memorandum](#) from San Francisco shows that the FBI sought to renew a contract with a trainer and expert advisor to FBI agents, whose draft lesson plan contained:

- **Racist and derogatory assertions about Arabs and Islam:** [“the Arab mind is a Cluster Thinker, while the Western mind tends to be a linear thinker”](#), and [“although Islam was not able to change the cluster Arab mind thinking into a linear one . . . it alleviated some of the weakness that inflicted the Arab mind in general”](#);
- **Faulty non-sequiturs:** [“Historically, the mainstream Muslims have always been the silent weak majority within the Islamic faith”](#);
- **Hyperbole:** [“a mainstream Muslim may be subverted to terroristic causes, but an extremist/terrorist Muslim will never be brought back to the mainstream side of the Islamic faith, NEVER”](#); and
- **Outright falsehoods:** [“Wahabis control the Koran and it’s \[sic\] issuance and distribution worldwide. No Koran is distributed without the approval of the Saudi Arabian government’s religious institutions.”](#)

The FBI also collaborated with the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point to produce a 2008 “Counterterrorism Textbook” called [“Terrorism & Political Islam: Origins, Ideologies, and Methods”](#). Although more carefully written and professionally produced than other FBI training materials, the textbook contains essays that reinforce many of the same problematic themes: that Muslims and Arabs are inherently “different” from other Americans and should be treated with suspicion; that Islam is inherently violent; and that religious practices and political activism by Muslims and Arabs are signs of increasing dangerousness. [One essay](#) claims that “[t]he most important categorization made in establishing an ideological profile” of a Muslim militant is “activism”. [A second essay](#) emphasizes that “[a] person answering with a patriotic and pro-Western stance” to questions about Iraq, Palestine, and the governments of Egypt and Israel could potentially “evolve into a street informant or concerned citizen,” while those who express concerns likely “follow[] militant ideology.”

The ACLU's analysis of dozens of FBI counterterrorism course assessments suggests that the FBI used this textbook to [train](#) FBI agents and trainees from November 2008 to at least January 2011. Certain instructors were troubled enough to voice concern about bias in the course materials. For example, in 2008, an instructor ["strongly" recommended](#) removing language from the course syllabus that suggested that the North American Muslim community "has both wittingly and unwittingly provided safe haven for terrorist and criminal networks." In early 2009, an instructor [twice challenged](#) the statement that "understanding Diaspora communities as a safe haven for crime and terrorism," which was listed as an "objective" of the course, because the statement "implies that all Diaspora communities provide sanctuary for terrorism." There is no record of what, if anything, the FBI did in response to these concerns.

The ACLU and other civil rights organizations [have called for](#) the withdrawal of biased FBI intelligence products that, like these training materials, are factually incorrect, equate Islamic beliefs or practices with violence or criminal activity, or feature derogatory remarks about Muslims, Arabs, or South Asians.

THE PROBLEM:

Biased and erroneous training materials and intelligence products do a disservice to all Americans. They mislead law enforcement officers with flawed facts and analysis, and unfairly cast suspicion on all American Muslims, and Americans of Arab and South Asian origin, leading to civil rights violations and misdirected investigations. They also contribute to inappropriate law enforcement questioning and surveillance of the American Muslim community, the infiltration of mosques by informants acting as agents provocateur, and growing racial and religious animus against Arab, South Asian and Muslim Americans within the government and the broader community.

The FBI has [committed](#) to reviewing its training materials, and the ACLU has [written](#) to request that faulty intelligence products be included within this review.

THE SOLUTION:

The ACLU calls on the FBI to:

- Immediately identify and remove all biased training materials and intelligence products;
- Establish effective standards and procedures to ensure that training programs and intelligence products are aimed at actual crime problems and national security threats, only contain information based on empirically sound research, and are not affected by racial, ethnic, religious animus or political viewpoints; and
- Establish effective standards and procedures to vet trainers and intelligence analysts to ensure they possess valid credentials and appropriate education and training relevant to the material that they publish and/or present.

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To learn more about the ACLU's "Mapping the FBI" initiative, please visit www.aclu.org/mapping-FBI