

New Jersey and the Jihad

Across the river from Manhattan, the cities of the Garden State were once fertile soil for plots against the homeland—but revulsion in the Muslim community and efforts by law enforcement have changed that.

By LIZA PORTEUS



A group of Muslim women walk in front of the Superman ride at the Six Flags Great Escape Adventure Amusement Park in New Jersey. They joined thousands of other Muslim Americans at the park's "Muslim day."

LYNSEY ADDARIO/CORBIS

THE SO-CALLED "BOMB FACTORY" THAT USED TO SIT ON A LOT THAT MADE UP 40 PAMRAPO AVE. IN JERSEY CITY IS NOW NOTHING MORE THAN A DIRT MOUND SURROUNDED BY A HALF-DEMOLISHED RUSTED METAL FENCE. YELLOW TAPE EMBLAZONED WITH THE WORDS "FIRE LINE—DO NOT CROSS" MARKS OFF THE FRONT OF THE PROPERTY WHERE AN APARTMENT BUILDING ONCE STOOD.

At the end of the street consisting of multiple-family and some single-family homes, a mail carrier delivers the day's letters to a neighborhood mom-and-pop convenience store. A truck with the bumper sticker "God Bless America" is parked on the street across from the lot where almost 15 years ago convicted terrorists Ramzi Yousef and his associates built the bomb that they would use to try to topple the World Trade Center.

Just a few miles away, a stone's throw from lower Manhattan where the World Trade Center once stood, is the Al Salam Mosque in Jersey City. Located on the busy JFK Boulevard in Journal Square, the mosque sits above T-Mobile, Casa de Los Primos and Marcos Jewelry stores. The windows are open during a stifling hot August day, and a heavy curtain hangs by a cord over a couple of windows.

The mosque is one of several in the New York area where the blind Egyptian cleric Omar Abdel Rahman preached his radical views. Known more famously as the "Blind Sheik," Rahman is now serving a life sentence in the US Penitentiary Administrative Maximum Facility in Florence, Colo. Formerly a resident of New York City, Rahman and nine others were convicted of "seditious conspiracy" for their involvement in a failed plot to bomb New York City landmarks. The prosecution of the man labeled a "terrorist" by the US State Department grew out of investigations of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

WHY HERE?

Perhaps these terrorists settled down in the extremely ethnically diverse Jersey City because it was easy to blend in with the high concentration of fellow Muslims. Perhaps they thought they could stay off law enforcement's radar in that densely populated city of 260,000 residents—400,000 if commuters are counted—in a 14-square-mile area. Or maybe it was simply because of the city's proximity to their targets in New York and the fact that rents are much cheaper on the Jersey side of the Hudson River than in Manhattan.

"If you look at a lot of the plotting—and this is true in Europe as well as the United States—a lot of the plotting takes place near where the attack is going to take place," Gary LaFree, director of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, told *HSToday*. LaFree is also a sociologist and criminologist at the College Park campus' Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice.

START is studying where terrorists plan attacks and where attacks actually happen.

Promoting dialogue

At START (the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism), a three-year project is ongoing in an effort to get Muslim, Christian and Jewish students to begin interfaith dialogues that touch on difficult issues like religion and violence. Launched with a grant from the Department of Homeland Security two years ago, the project involves five universities—Tufts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Brandeis, University of Maryland and Wesleyan College—to see how a more open dialogue can combat extremism on campuses and even off campus. It's trying to dispel any misperceptions people may have about education levels and tendencies toward violence, but it also looks at tools that can be used as preventative measures against extremism.

"There are no shortcuts for dealing with violence against civilians," said Edward Kaufman, senior research associate with the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland who is working on the project. He added that trust is a very important factor in forging relationships that, hopefully one day, will nip extremist feelings in the bud before they get out of hand.

"These are very sensitive issues, although people say, 'Why should the Department of Homeland Security pay for Jews to invite Arabs to eat Jewish food?'" Kaufman said. "It's the little things—learning the traditions of each other, learning the foods of each other... that generates the trust necessary to deal with the issues more important."

The project looks at different scenarios of religious prejudice and tension and ways for different faiths to come together to mitigate their impact. Students use "community mediation" to resolve conflicts and cope with crises in constructive ways. The technique has been tested on four or five campuses. Also under development is a board game with 40 steps called "Abrahamic games"—named after the true father of all three religions.

"We can't just play games about it; we have to do more," Kaufman acknowledged, noting that the group also studies statements of different religious leaders, both violent and non-violent.

"We look at the statements of the current spiritual leaders, current being the last 20 years, and we ask ourselves, 'Is this something that's prevailing?'" Kaufman said of the violence and extremism that riddles a few predominant speakers' messages. "Our experience is that, in these three religions, it's mostly the exception to the rule."

In the spring of 2008, the project will also attempt to get participants to engage in an online discussion with young people elsewhere who seem to be favoring violence over dialogue when it comes to religion, no matter which religion. One method that may be useful when encountering a Muslim who favors violence is to review history instead of spouting rhetoric and displaying what Kaufman called an "arrogance of power."

"What could be much better is to say to the Muslims, 'Look, the Christians have gone through a lot of violence. We had a terrible thing called the Inquisition where we set people on fire in order to convert,'" he said. The long wars between Protestants and Catholics led to the deaths of thousands over the years—many more than have been killed in sectarian violence in Iraq. "We have gone through a lot of violence to articulate religion ... from our own suffering and our own use of violence, we wish to share with our Muslim brothers—they should not go through the terrible things that we have done."

Compared to Caucasian, American-born terrorist Timothy McVeigh—the Oklahoma City bomber who was transient and traveled through many states from his birth in Lockport, NY, until April 19, 1995, when he blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building—“the international jihadi folks don’t blend in as well,” LaFree said.

But some Jersey City locals say it’s not usual to see extremists of any religion regularly walking the streets spewing anti-American hate speech.

“If you think of the couple of extremists out there, people willing to die, that have blended in with a few hundred thousand other people—it’s not a high density. It’s not like people are chanting in the street or burning an American flag or a George Bush effigy. There’s absolutely no overt evidence of extremism,” said Malcolm King, a 31-year-old information technology specialist who has lived in Jersey City for more than six years.

“Considering this is one of the most populous metropolitan areas in the world with one of the most high-profile western targets, I don’t know if there’s really a high concentration of extremist activity,” he continued. And if there were, King added, “I would think there would be far more incidents” of bus bombings and other types of attacks.

“I don’t have any indication this is a very radical community. And this community is very diverse,” agreed Ali Chaudry, president of the Center for Understanding Islam in New Jersey—formed after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks—and a co-founder of the Islamic Society of Central Jersey. “I think it is more of a matter of circumstance than any indication that here you have fertile ground for the kind of work these people are doing.” There are “certainly a broad spectrum of views and opinions, but, by and large, you will not find this state has any fertile ground,” he continued.

Jersey City isn’t the only area of New Jersey that alleged or convicted extremists have called home.

Four of so-called Fort Dix 6—the group of men who government prosecutors say were plotting to fire rocket-propelled grenades and kill scores of American soldiers at the US Army’s Fort Dix—lived in Cherry Hill, a neighborhood where Islamic extremism is far from the minds of locals. The fifth man lived in Philadelphia, while the sixth lived in Williamstown, NJ. Four of those being charged were born in the former Yugoslavia, one was born in Turkey and one in Jordan.

“Terrorist attacks are not always going to be on the grand scale of September 11. But keep in mind that terrorist attacks are about creating terror, and an attack on an American military institution in our country clearly would have created the type of terror that people like these who believe in jihad want to perpetrate on American citizens,” Chris Christie, the United States attorney in New Jersey, said during a press conference in May after the arrests. “We believe this attack has now been completely defused.”

A criminal complaint filed in United States District Court said one of the defendants, Dritan Duka, conspired with four others “to kill officers and employees of agencies in the executive branch” of the government. It said Duka, who had other aliases, carried out his conspiracies in Camden, Burlington

LIZA PORTEUS FOR HISTODAY



The Masjid Al-Salam mosque in Jersey City where the blind, radical Egyptian imam Omar Abdel Rahman preached prior to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

and Monmouth counties in New Jersey for about a year and a half, including firearms training, collecting weapons and viewing terrorist training videos.

The group allegedly trained by playing paintball in the New Jersey woods. Authorities say they also conducted target practice at a firing range in Pennsylvania’s Pocono Mountains, where they had rented a house.

Christie said the six men planned to purchase rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and then use them to fire at Humvees at Fort Dix and “light the whole place up.”

These men have not yet had their day in court, and many who know them have expressed disbelief that they could have been planning such an act. Some relatives, however, acknowledged that some of the men had become somewhat radical in their beliefs.

The three ethnic Albanian Duka brothers—Eljvir, Shain and Dritan, all of whom have been charged—not only prayed at the South Jersey Islamic Center in Palmyra (which is just across the state lines from the Philadelphia mosque some of the men attended) but also helped fix the place up. A fourth suspect, Serdar Tatar, prayed there on Fridays.

Some leaders of the mosque, including Naseem and Ismail Badat, had “absolutely no idea—they wouldn’t have suspected these people to utter any words of hate or anger. These people were roofers, they did handy work around the mosque,” said Chaudry, who knows the Badats. “We had absolutely no notion, no indication whatsoever from any interaction with them that they were holding any kind of anger against the United States—or soldiers, for that matter.”

Both mosques have good relations with the community and law enforcement and are considered to be centers of mainstream Islam, so the arrests came as a shock to many in the community.

“You have pockets in these communities” where nefarious

planning could be taking place, Chaudry said. “That is one of our real challenges, frankly, because you don’t know. Look at all these horrible cases of violence you hear about every day. How do you know what’s in somebody’s mind?”

ASSIMILATION—OR NOT

Muslims openly embrace their religion and practice more traditional aspects of their faith in Jersey City than in most other American communities. While many assimilate, many Muslim women walk through the streets of Jersey City fully clothed in long sleeves, pants and the hejab, the traditional headscarf worn for modesty, even on 90-degree summer days. Mosques abound in the area, but that is hardly exclusive to Jersey City.

“If you’re coming from another country and you don’t entirely understand American culture, you’re going to look for a supportive community that understands your culture,” LaFree said. “You’re going to seek out people who understand your culture and language.”

According to Census Bureau estimates, Jersey City’s population in 2003 was about 239,097. According to 2000 census figures, 34 percent of the 240,000 population that year was white, 28.3 percent was black or African American, 16.2 percent Asian, 28.3 percent Latino or Hispanic and 21 percent said they were of one or two “other” races. Thirty-four percent of the population in 2000 was foreign-born, and 72.6 percent said a language other than English was spoken at home. Medium annual household income in 1999 was \$37,862, compared to just over \$55,000 for New Jersey as a whole. Meanwhile, 18.6 percent were below the poverty level, compared to 8.5 percent in the entire state.

But just as many residents enjoy the diversity of Jersey City and the freedom of people of all religious and ethnic backgrounds to come together and live their lives in relative peace—a far cry from the living conditions in many other countries across the globe from which they came. They also realize cities like this are perfect for would-be terrorists aiming to blend in.

“Certainly the American Muslim community in general and the people in New Jersey are by and large professionals,” Chaudry said. “But of course, there are some pockets, like in Jersey City and perhaps in other towns, perhaps in Paterson and elsewhere, you may have some working-class [people] whose education may be limited and may be more perhaps susceptible to listening to extremist imams [Islamic leader] and certainly not standing up” to them.

Paterson, which is New Jersey’s third-largest city, according to 2006 census numbers, has a population of about 148,000 and is home to the second-largest Arab-American community in the United States, next to Dearborn, Mich. Paterson and Prospect Park, NJ, are the only municipalities in the state where public schools observe Muslim holidays. The city has always been a melting pot and is also home to many Peruvian, Lebanese, Pakistani, Puerto Rican and African American immigrants, among others.

When asked, New Jersey Muslims quickly point out they are a peace-loving people and they are just as angry as everyone else at extremists who commit terrorist acts or are suspected of extremist movements that give Islam a bad name. And while some are hesitant to describe any specific threats

they see in the community nowadays, or in the greater New Jersey area, they recognize there is reason to be wary, particularly in some communities.

“You can’t call them anything but stupid, ignorant morons who lost their minds,” Suzanne Loutfy, political adviser to Ahmed Shedeed, president of the Islamic Center of Jersey City, said of the terrorists. “Later on, when we found out these people happened to be Arabs and happened to be Muslims, I was angry. I was very angry. How dare they drag the name of their religion into the mud like that? It’s like, you know, when a little kid says, ‘The devil made me do it.’ You’re responsible for your actions; don’t hang it on your religion. ... Even the devil doesn’t make us do things; it’s free will. We’re very upset with these few nuts—and I don’t know how to describe these people in language that I can use. They don’t represent Islam; they don’t represent Muslims.”

Chaudry added of the extremists willing to kill in the name of Allah: “They have a totally distorted view of the Koran and the example of the Prophet, especially the Prophet’s own example of how he worked with people of all communities when he was trying to establish a just society in Medina. He negotiated with people; he taught people you could act together and do business with each other, rather than looting each other’s caravans for a living.”

Chaudry’s sentiments accord with a Pew research survey released in May 2007 of 1,050 Muslim Americans throughout the country (<http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf>), which found that 61 percent are concerned with Islamic extremism in the United States. While most reject extremism, fewer native-born African American Muslims than others completely condemn Al Qaeda. Furthermore, the survey found, a greater number of younger than older Muslims were more likely to express a strong sense of Muslim identity and were much more likely to say suicide bombings in the name of Islam can at least sometimes be justified.

“I don’t think, based on the pattern of answers to other questions, there is much difference between the Muslim community and the non-Muslim community about how they’re perceiving the Islamic extremism around the world and its ability to grow here,” said Scott Keeter, director of survey research at the Pew Research Center. “They’re reading the same newspapers and hearing the same thing” as non-Muslims regarding terror threats, he said, and, “Since the vast majority of Muslims here in the United States are not extreme, they have the same fear, as well.”

Pew asked Muslim Americans they surveyed to identify the most important problem facing Muslims in this country today.

“They didn’t say, ‘Terrorists amidst us.’ It was: ‘The rest of the public thinks there are terrorists among us—they think of us as un-American and out of the mainstream, and we’re not,’” Keeter said, adding that the backlash against extremist violence has come down heavily on non-extremist Muslims.

LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

The Muslim community in Jersey City is involved with law enforcement agencies on a variety of levels, said Loutfy, who also works as a high-school teacher in Jersey City and has attended the Islamic Center of Jersey City since 1980. Regular

meetings are held between Muslim groups and homeland security officials, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), to increase awareness and understanding between the two groups and to help dispel the aura of suspicion plaguing the community since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

One big reason for that suspicion is treatment of Muslims in the wake of the attacks. In the 11 months after the attacks, 762 aliens were detained in connection with the FBI terrorism investigation for various immigration offenses, including overstaying their visas and entering the country illegally, according to the Department of Justice (DoJ).

They were held at facilities in Brooklyn, NY, Passaic County Jail in Paterson, NJ, and one other northern New Jersey location. There were some complaints of detainee mistreatment at these facilities; those were proven to be found mainly at the Brooklyn location. Passaic housed 400 detainees through May 30, 2002—the largest number of Sept. 11 detainees of any US detention facility, according to DoJ.

Many detainees were swooped up on immigration violations without proof of any ties to terrorism, and many were stuck in jail for weeks or months without follow-up. In a 2003 review, DoJ discovered that the now-defunct Immigration and Naturalization Service did not consistently serve the Sept. 11 detainees with notice of the charges under which they were being held within the agency's goal of 72 hours, and some detainees did not receive

charging documents, called "notices to appear," for more than a month after being arrested. The latter delay affected the detainees' ability to understand why they were being held, obtain legal counsel and request a bond hearing.

"While our review recognized the enormous challenges and difficult circumstances confronting the department in responding to the terrorist attacks, we found significant problems in the way the detainees were handled," Justice Inspector General Glenn Fine said when a report on the review was released in June 2003. (The report, titled *The September 11 Detainees: A Review of the Treatment of Aliens Held on Immigration Charges in Connection with the Investigation of the September 11 Attacks*, can be found at www.fas.org/irp/agency/doj/oig/detainees.pdf.)

Combine that experience with a deeply instilled distrust of police by some immigrants who escaped police states or otherwise harsh governmental conditions, and few are willing to be chummy with cops.

"I think, for a long time, many Muslims would say that because they had an experience with police. If they are first-generation immigrants, their relationship with police in their home countries was a bad one. They didn't trust them; they wouldn't go to them for help," Chaudry said. "I think people are starting to recognize that law enforcement organizations are there to help us all."

Faces of evil

The most infamous of Jersey City's terrorists was a man prosecutors say led the cell that tried to blow up the World Trade Center in 1993. Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, who is known by dozens of aliases, was born Abdul Basit in Pakistan and grew up in Kuwait.

Yousef and one associate were actually detained while entering the country via John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York in 1992, and US Customs agents wanted to hold them because of conflicting identification documents and suspicious items found in their luggage—such as "How to Make a Bomb," manuals that raised some red flags. After being released, Yousef and co-conspirator Mohammed Salameh moved into an apartment at 34 Kensington Ave. in Jersey City. That residence was also shared with five other Middle Eastern men.

Looking for more privacy, Yousef and Salameh moved to a two-bedroom apartment at 251 Virginia Ave., less than a mile from the first apartment, and shared it with an Egyptian student. They made many overseas phone calls, including those to Al Qaeda member Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Mohammed Atta and to Bin Laden. They also held meetings there with other 1993 bombing co-conspirators. They later moved to the apartment at 40 Pamrapo Ave.

With the help of Salameh and Mahmud Abouhalima—both suspected by the US government of also having a hand in the 1990 assassination of Rabbi Meir Kahane, the fiery leader of the Jewish Defense League in New York—Yousef built a 1,500-pound urea nitrate-fuel oil device that he would use to try to blow up and topple the World Trade Center. The group built the device in the Pamrapo Avenue apartment that came to be known as "the bomb factory."

Some accounts reported that Salameh and co-conspirator Nidal Ayyad used the Jersey City Islamic Center as a mailing address, and

Saleme had that address on his New York driver's license. But Suzanne Loutfy, political adviser to Ahmed Shedeed, president of the center, said she had not heard that before, and it is not customary for worshippers to receive mail there.

On Feb. 26, 1993, the cell drove a vehicle below Tower One of the trade center. When the bomb exploded, six people were killed and another 1,042 were injured. It was supposed to demolish the foundation of the North Tower and cause it to collapse on the South Tower, but the terrorists' calculations were off.

Yousef escaped, but was arrested at an Al Qaeda safehouse in Islamabad, Pakistan, in 1995 and extradited to the United States to be tried in New York City with two other plotters. He was also convicted of planning the Bojinka plot to simultaneously bomb 12 airliners in 1995. He was sentenced to life in prison without parole and is now at the same Supermax prison, the US Penitentiary Administrative Maximum Facility in Florence, Colo., as the blind Egyptian cleric Omar Abdel Rahman, who was convicted of "seditious conspiracy" for his involvement, along with nine others, in a failed plot to bomb New York City landmarks. Rahman's prosecution stemmed from investigations of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Yousef is the nephew of senior Al Qaeda leader Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who is now in US custody in Guantanamo Bay.

In 1994, Yousef and Mohammed traveled to Cebu in the central Philippines to create an Al Qaeda spin-off cell. Yousef was involved in plots to assassinate Pope John Paul II during a visit to the Philippines and a plan to have a suicide pilot fly a small plane loaded with explosives into Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) headquarters in Langley, Va., according to former CIA Director George Tenet in his book, *At the Center of the Storm*.

"Yes, I am a terrorist and proud of it as long as it is against the US

Neither the FBI nor Jersey City Police Department would detail to *HSToday* exactly what steps they take to track or root out potential terrorists. Law enforcement typically is loathe to detail sources and methods, arguing that it compromises them and may endanger ongoing investigations.

The FBI regularly meets with the community to help inform them about what the agency is doing to protect them and the community at large—not just from terrorist threats, but also from Internet fraud, identity theft, online predators of children and the like.

“We started building these bridges actually a long time ago, even before 9/11, but the need for it gave both sides a push to not take it as a luxury but as a necessity, so we can exist in an atmosphere of safety,” Loutfy explained.

She said the relationship between the Muslim community and law enforcement has improved “tremendously” in the past few years, and many high-level law enforcement officers and officials are on a first-name basis with Muslim leaders in Jersey City.

“When you’re approached as a friend from either side, the communication is much more comfortable and more relaxed and you can accomplish more,” Loutfy continued. “Also, we cannot deny that ignorance sometimes hinders efforts to progress. On both sides also, we still have a percentage of ignorance where people don’t want to know, don’t want to learn,

don’t want to listen, and that is shrinking tremendously in the past years. Knowledge is invading the darkness of ignorance.”

Part of the shining light in these dark corners is educating law enforcement about some aspects of Islamic culture and religious practices that may seem suspicious to them—such as a Muslim woman alone not answering the door to let a male police officer into her home.

“That may seem suspicious, but it’s not,” Loutfy explained. “Religiously, it’s not allowed for a woman to let a man into the house.”

Sean Guinn, a special agent in the FBI’s Newark office, noted that those Muslims—or residents of any religious or ethnic background—who cooperate with law enforcement do so because they want to live in peace and be rid of the post-Sept. 11 shadow.

The FBI has a “very good and robust relationship with community leaders in almost all the highly populated areas,” Guinn told *HSToday*. “We’ve been reaching out to these neighborhoods for many years.”

Part of the FBI’s routine is to send supervisors and agents out onto streets in neighborhoods such as West Paterson in Passaic County to talk with locals, as well as imams and other religious leaders.

“It’s just an opportunity to meet people,” Guinn said.

But those outreach efforts aren’t exclusive to Muslim enclaves. They’re also extended to neighborhoods of other

government,” Yousef said during his trial. The judge in the case, Kevin Duffy, referred to him as “an apostle of evil.”

The New York investigation found the cell’s network of support spread across Brooklyn, Queens and northern New Jersey; it seemed to center on Rahman, the “Blind Sheikh,” who spent time with Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan. Rahman had been sentenced in absentia for terrorism in Egypt and was on the State Department’s visa look-out list, but he still managed to move to New York after getting a visa at the US Embassy in Sudan. By keeping a close eye on Rahman, within months investigators uncovered another terror cell planning to bomb the Lincoln and Holland tunnels, United Nations headquarters and other landmarks.

Another terrorist connected to this New Jersey cell was El Sayyid Nosair, an Egyptian-born American citizen convicted for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and for the assassination of Kahane. Nosair—who authorities later determined was part of Al Qaeda—was convicted during the Blind Sheikh’s trial and is spending the rest of his life at the same Colorado prison.

In his book *Against All Enemies*, Richard Clarke, former White House counterterrorism adviser to President Bill Clinton and President George Bush, confirmed that Nosair’s legal bills were ultimately paid by Bin Laden himself, and that he and three other WTC plotters were linked to an Islamic center in Brooklyn funded by the elusive Al Qaeda ringleader.

Nosair rented an apartment in Cliffside Park, NJ—a few towns north of Jersey City and located just south of the George Washington Bridge—where, in 1990, investigators found US military documents and training materials from Fort Bragg, NC, maps of New York landmarks like the World Trade Center, tapes of the Blind Sheikh’s threatening sermons and materials connecting him to the Afghan



RUTH POLACKREUTERS

The 1995 trial of the conspirators who planned to bomb New York City landmarks. Egyptian cleric Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman is upper right in cap. His followers are, from left, Siddig Ibrahim, Siddig Ali, El Sayyid Nosair, Victor Alvarez, Ibrahim Elgabrowni, and Clement Hampton-El. Judge Michael Mukasey is at right and prosecutor Andrew McCarthy is at center bottom. Mukasey was nominated for US Attorney General in September.

Services Bureau, run by Bin Laden. Salameh and Abdouhalima were nabbed during the Nosair probe, but were later let go and, three years later, assisted Yousef in trying to blow up the World Trade Center. Nosair worshipped at the Masjid Al Salam mosque in Jersey City—the same mosque where the Blind Sheikh preached.

Because extremists like this have used the communities in New Jersey as a type of safe haven while they plotted, many imams, mosques and law enforcement members are now on the lookout for those who may pose an extremist threat to their community and the country many of them consider home.

religious and ethnic groups. Agents may, for example, visit a heavily Cuban neighborhood and visit a family owned bodega to talk to them about any recent concerns, or just for a meet-and-greet to get face time with the people they've sworn to protect.

"When an agent goes through training at the FBI academy as a new agent, one of the things you learn is that a large part of your job as a special agent is just talking to people," Guinn explained. "What may seem nouveau and novel since 9/11 is not new to the FBI—we've been doing it forever."

Military cadets from the US Military Academy at West Point in New York also spend several days in Jersey City mosques, temples and churches to get a flavor for the cultures, religions and traditions they will come upon when deployed overseas. As part of the academy's "Winning the Peace" curriculum, which was launched in 2003, cadets meet, sleep and eat with leaders and young people from the city's Indian, Pakistani and Egyptian Coptic Christian communities. It's part of the US military's recognition that, in order to win the hearts and minds of residents of countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, US servicemen and women trying to resettle displaced populations, rebuild infrastructures and keep the peace need to demonstrate a better understanding of the region in which they are deployed.

Lt. Edgar Martinez, a public information officer who has been with the Jersey City Police Department for 20 years, said the program is a positive effort for law enforcement, various ethnic communities and the cadets. He also said many mosques will separately invite police officers to come and speak to worshippers to address concerns and to have a point of contact.

Martinez described the relationship between the police department and the Muslim community as "good." When asked if there was still a reluctance to come forward with information that may be helpful to police, he said: "We've been building relationships, not only with the Muslim population. This city ... is really a diverse city. Everyone you can think of is here. We're a true melting pot, and everyone gets along really well with each other," he said.

While some rural—and less diverse—areas had problems with anti-Muslim backlash after the Sept. 11 attacks, Martinez said that was barely a blip on the radar here:

"We didn't have those problems that other cities had with their Muslim communities because everyone worked hand in hand."

To continue that spirit, the mayor, police chief and other officials try to ensure that every religious and cultural group—West Caribbeans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Filipinos—gets a chance to hold band festivals, religious events, parades and other activities to celebrate their heritage and culture. During all of them, the police have a presence not just to protect the city but to show those particular groups law enforcement is there to protect them, as well.

"Everyone in the city gets together," Martinez said. "People come in and say, 'Oh, you don't have problems?' We don't have any of them. They don't believe it."

PROACTIVE EFFORTS

Mosques in New Jersey have youth groups much like those in Christian churches to provide an outlet for younger believers to congregate and practice their faith with others their age and to keep them away from drugs, alcohol and other temptations. Since it's often younger Muslims who tend toward radicalism these days, this outreach is vitally important.

"The community at large, when we see things happening, when we see students taking part in certain activities at conferences or initiating websites with radical ideas, that is what I think the local leadership needs to address," Chaudry said.

At Chaudry's Center for Understanding Islam (CUI), "We're trying to work on some of the initiatives people had suggested to bring some of the community together and try to address any type of extremism that raises its ugly head in the community."

A June 24 CUI conference examined those issues. The organization's next move is to have a retreat for the imams—African, Arab, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Turkish, etc.—to share information with each other and discuss speakers making their way through the state's mosque circuit to determine whose views may distort the faith.

But Chaudry said Muslims also have to be strong enough to stand up against extremist imams and others who may be visiting speakers at mosques or elsewhere—something he practices frequently. And more Muslims are willing to do this today than a few years ago, he pointed out.

"Will you stand up to them? If somebody comes ... people didn't used to raise their hand; they used to sort of ignore that, but now they do because people recognize it is their responsibility to stand up to [extremist] ideas," he said. "A lot of people who make these emotional statements, they don't really understand it themselves and it suits their political purpose, their rhetoric [at the time]. ... Our challenge really is to stand up to them."

ANALYSIS

Richard Clarke, former counterterrorism adviser to both President Clinton and President George W. Bush, acknowledged in his book *Against All Enemies*, that it took too long for the FBI and other law enforcement arms to put the pieces together linking Al Qaeda, Yousef, the Blind Sheik and other shadowy characters plotting terror against the United States while living in our backyard. Not only did the nation's top cops learn from this experience but so did the Muslim community. The majority are determined not to let potential evildoers live in their midst without standing up to the extremist rhetoric they say poses a danger to their community and America as a whole.

"We are all Americans and we need to think in terms of ... all of us together and we need to be sure if there are individuals who think otherwise and may entertain some ideas, we need to stem that," Chaudry said. **HSI**

LIZA PORTEUS is a freelance writer based in Hoboken, NJ. Her previous article for *HSToday*, "NYC: Big plans, bigger needs," appeared in the September 2007 issue.