

## **Japanese, Muslims recall racism Pearl Harbor, 9/11 ushered in dark ages for both societies**

By Michael Manekin, STAFF WRITER  
Inside Bay Area

Article Last Updated:12/08/2006 07:02:38 AM PST

When the Imperial Japanese Navy swooped over Pearl Harbor 65 years ago and destroyed more than 2,400 American lives, Mas Yamasaki was watching a church basketball game in Sacramento. He was 12, and he didn't know that he would soon live in a detention camp in Tule Lake — sleeping on an Army-issued mattress, braving the elements without indoor plumbing or heat. The child of Japanese immigrants, Yamasaki was born an American citizen. But he spent 3 1/2 years of his American childhood in the camp — he was considered a threat to national security. The internment of Japanese immigrants is familiar to most Americans — in large part, because Yamasaki and legions of Japanese camp survivors have made their voices heard. Now, Yamasaki and other survivors are speaking out against a new danger. "We were stereotyped," said Yamasaki. "Now, with the Muslims, it's the same thing. Everyone's pointing fingers saying they're an enemy."

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor stripped Japanese-Americans of their homes and freedom. But five years ago, the actions of 19 hijackers radically altered the lives of the county's estimated 6 million Muslims.

"Pearl Harbor gave the United States the excuse to discriminate against Japanese-Americans by saying these guys are potential saboteurs," said Steve Okamoto, co-president of the San Mateo chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). "Now, they're lumping (Muslims) together like they did with the Japanese."

Okamoto, 65, was only 6 weeks old when he and his family were shipped from their home to the Tanforan Racetrack in San Bruno and later to the Topaz internment camp in Utah. He spent his first four years in the Utah desert.

After 9/11, Okamoto and other members of the JACL were the first non-Muslims to speak out against the swirling dust storm of anti-Muslim hate speech.

Okamoto since has helped coordinate JACL forums with Muslim Americans to speak out on the dangerous excesses of stereotyping — both past and present.

In February, Imam Tahir Anwar, the director of religious services at the South Bay Islamic Center in San Jose, appeared at a JACL event to honor the Day of Remembrance — the day that President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 and authorized the detention of Japanese-Americans.

"The decisions that have been made by the Administration after Sept. 11 — and the decisions made after Pearl Harbor — have not been very friendly to a lot of Americans," Anwar said this week.

"People have suffered. After Pearl Harbor, it was the Japanese. And now, it's almost anyone who is a Muslim, looks like a Muslim, comes from a Muslim country or has anything that sounds like a Muslim last name."

While Anwar, 28, has avoided the kind of physical and verbal assaults that make hate-crime headlines

in the nation's newspapers, many members of his congregation have experienced discrimination. As a result, some are reluctant to fly out of the country, fearful of religious and ethnic profiling. Others are worried that the government is spying on them. Once, Anwar said, a member of his congregation got a knock on the door at 6 a.m. from an FBI agent.

He wanted to check up on a \$20 check the man had written to a Muslim charity. "You would imagine that we would learn after Pearl Harbor, but we just haven't learned the most important lesson: Don't judge people based on the color of their skin or what they look like," said Anwar.

While Anwar pointed out that Japanese Americans suffered far worse after the bombing of Pearl Harbor than Muslim Americans after 9/11, he added that "Muslims do feel like they're living in a camp."

Although Muslim Americans face stereotyping and spying, many of the most blatant victims of negative typecasting are Muslims on extended visits to the country.

After 9/11, more than 1,000 men from Muslim countries were detained, mostly on immigration charges. Many of those charged were later deported.

In 2002 and 2003, Muslim men and boys living in the United States from about 20 countries were told to register with immigration officials under the threat of deportation.

But some Muslim Americans say they don't feel discriminated against.

Imam Abdurrahman Anwar is the younger brother of Imam Tahir Anwar. He is also the religious director of the Muslim Community Association of the Peninsula, a mosque and community center in Belmont. Unlike his brother, Imam Abdurrahman Anwar has not encountered much racial profiling and discrimination.

People in the Bay Area, he said, are more enlightened and understanding. When Anwar, 22, walks around town with his beard and his "thobe" (an ankle-length gown worn by Muslims), he gets friendly inquiries about his faith alongside the stares.

But some members of his congregation are not so fortunate.

On a recent evening, Imad Kadoumi, 48, sat on the mosque's carpeted floor and chatted about his experiences in the nation's airports — flying while Muslim.

"When I go anywhere in the world, because of my U.S. passport, they treat me like a king," said Kadoumi, who lives in Belmont. "And when I come home to my country, they treat me like (expletive)."

Kadoumi, a travel agent for Hadid International Services, often travels out of the country — whether to Syria, where he was born, or elsewhere in the Middle East — and he is consistently profiled by federal security and customs agents. Before a recent flight from Calgary, after U.S. Customs detained him for more than an hour, Kadoumi asked the agent why he was always detained. The agent replied by asking if he was aware of 9/11.

"I told him, 'Of course. That was my country they bombed, too,'" Kadoumi said.

Watching the Twin Towers burn on 9/11, Kadoumi said he felt outrage against the terrorists. Then, in the weeks that followed, he was blindsided by the negative stereotyping against Muslims.

"I never expected that the discrimination would be to this magnitude," said Kadoumi. "It's gone too far — and it's building, actually. We feel the fear day by day. We're really suffering. And when I see down the tunnel, there's no light. It's all darkness."

Kadoumi's outlook may seem bleak, but he lives with his glass half-full. Since 9/11, he's made a special

point of participating in interfaith outreach with Jews and Christians.

In fact, everywhere he goes — from work to the market to the mall — Kadoumi is an "ambassador" for Islam, making a special point to proclaim his respect for all religions, all people.

Like most American Muslims, he prays for an end to terror — and an end to the war on terror, which has made him a villain to some and a suspect to many.

After all, Japanese-Americans may have faced imprisonment, but they eventually fought their way back into the mainstream of this immigrant nation. In 1988, President George H.W. Bush even issued an apology for the country's detainment of Japanese in the wake of Pearl Harbor.

At some point, the U.S. government may apologize to Muslims and Muslim Americans. Only, Kadoumi, for one, said he is not holding his breath.

"I don't see any changes in the government's perspective," he said. "If they realize they made a mistake, they'll apologize — and right now, I don't think that's even feasible."