

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS: AFTERMATH OF TERROR

Client: Rock the Vote & MTV
Discussion Guide (Text Only)

REACTIONS TO PATERSON, NJ

- Although Paterson is unique in its connection to the events of 9/11, in some ways it is like many large suburbs throughout the United States. How is Paterson similar to your community? How is it different?
- What was your impression of the people living in Paterson?
- Why do you think the hijackers chose to reside in Paterson? How do you think this made both the Muslim and non-Muslim residents feel about their community?
- How do you feel about the Mayor's statements that nobody celebrated in the streets after the Twin Towers fell?

PERSPECTIVES ON SAFETY AND VIOLENCE

- Why is it that Emily felt unsafe in Paterson but Ahmed and Nagwa found it a "safe little community"?
- In reference to Arab Americans, Margaret said that you can't tell "the good ones" from "the bad ones." How do you feel about her statement?
- One of Muhammed's friends said of the hijackers, "these people... are not evil... they feel the U.S. performed atrocities against them." Do you agree with his statement? Are there circumstances where violence is justified? If not – what are the alternatives to violence?
- Muhammed and Tariq wondered if Americans' desire for revenge after 9/11 made them feel justified in waging war on Afghanistan. In your opinion, was retaliation justified? Why or why not?
- How have the events of 9/11 changed your perceptions on safety?
- Has the war with Afghanistan affected these perceptions at all? How?
- In the video, shop owners Dean and Lou sided with President Bush in his "you're either with us or against us" response to terrorism. Do you think most Americans sided with Bush after 9/11? Did you? Why or why not?

PERSONAL REACTIONS TO THE VIDEO

- Of Mike, Emily, and Nagwa, with whom do you most identify, and why? With whom do you least identify and why?
- In your opinion, what is the message of the video?
- Do you believe the video will spark debate and change the way people think?
- Did you disagree with any viewpoints presented in the video? Please explain.

- Did you feel anything was missing from this video? What stories would you like to see told?

PERSONAL REACTIONS TO 9/11

- Where were you when you first heard about the attacks? How did the news make you feel?
- Were you afraid? If so, what was it specifically that you feared? How did you overcome this fear?
- How were the people in your life affected by the terrorist attacks?
- After the attacks, did you find yourself mistrusting others? Whom did you mistrust, and why?
- In your opinion, how has life changed for Americans after 9/11? How has life changed in your community?
- Do you blame anyone for the events of 9/11? If so, who? Why?

THE MEDIA

- Shortly after the attacks, radio personality Curtis Sliwa announced on air that people were “having parties” in the streets. He later dubbed Paterson “home of al Qaeda.” How did this and other media coverage affect the people of Paterson? Would the situation be different if the media had not gotten involved? Why? Why not?
- In the days following 9/11, Muhammed and his friends discussed their mistrust of the media surrounding bin Laden’s and al Qaeda’s role in the attacks. Were they right to mistrust the media during this time?
- Do you trust the media now? Why? Why not?
- What forms of the media (TV, radio, newspaper, magazines, internet) do you trust the most? The least?
- What interest does the media take in shaping public opinion?
- In what ways did media coverage of 9/11 and the hijackers affect Muslims in your community? How about non-Muslims?
- What measures can you take to be a responsible reader/viewer/listener of the media?
- This video featured the reactions of both non-Muslim Americans and Muslim-Americans to the war on Afghanistan. Non-Muslim Americans supported Bush; Muslim-Americans were critical of him. Why do you think the video did not feature any Muslims who supported Bush? Or any non-Muslims who were critical of him?

A CULTURE WITHIN A CULTURE

- Nagwa and her Egyptian friends talked about the desire to hold onto their Muslim culture by pulling closer to it – especially after 9/11. For minorities in the U.S., what are the advantages of drawing closer to your culture? Are there any disadvantages?
- Nagwa said she underwent a daily struggle to wear her scarves in public, especially after 9/11. In what ways is the struggle worthwhile? In what ways is it not?
- As Muslim-Americans, Muhammad, Tariq, and Andrew were critical of the U.S. government's desire to have bin Laden extradited and tried for the hijackings without proof. Do you think they were justified in their beliefs?
- Is it okay to criticize American policy? Why or why not?
- Muslim stated that he and his friends did not feel like true Americans unless they fully backed Bush's policy toward al Qaeda. In this case, "feeling American" to them meant doing something they did not feel comfortable doing. What does "feeling American" mean to you? What did it mean to you right after 9/11?
- What do you think it means to be an American? How did your opinions about this change after 9/11?
- In your opinion, is it possible to be both an American and a foreigner, such as an Arab? Why or why not?
- Nagwa stated that it was important for her to get out and publicly show people she was an American. She stated "We don't want people to misjudge us." Was it important that Muslims do this after 9/11? Why or why not? Discuss Muslim reactions to 9/11 in your community.
- In the video, Emily asked Pinar about Islamic beliefs by joking with her about eating pork. Is this appropriate? How do you approach others when you wish to learn about their ways of life? What kind of questions are appropriate? What, if anything, is inappropriate?
- In the video, Nagwa talks about the origins of the word "Jihad," which means "to strive or struggle" to practice religion in the face of oppression and persecution. Why do you think Jihad has been so misunderstood?

COMING TOGETHER AFTER 9/11

- Unity Parade planner Roberta Farber was insistent on holding meetings at City Hall and waiting for Muslims to contribute instead of seeking them out. What does this say about her feelings post 9/11 and her approach to "coming together"?
- Rajab stated that after 9/11, there was "more outreach, more interfaith dialogue" in Paterson. How have things changed in your community since the attacks?
- The parade organizers intended to "celebrate differences." Do you think they were successful?

- What kind of impact do you think the parade may have had on Paterson in the short term? In the long term?
- Mike stated that some people, no matter how hard they try, will never feel the same way about Muslims and Arabs. How do you think 9/11 has affected public perception of Muslim Americans? Have things returned to normal over six months later?
- Nagwa agreed with the parade's message to "come together and work as one hand." How do you think she was able to remain positive when others, such as Muhammed and Tariq, seemed so frustrated and angry?

TAKING ACTION AFTER 9/11

- How will your life change as a result of the attacks?
- What measures can you take to make yourself and others feel safe?
- How can you help foster dialogue in your community? What kind of questions are most important to ask? What issues are most important to discuss?
- How can you have an impact on American foreign policy, in Afghanistan and elsewhere?
- What steps can you take to educate yourself about other religions and belief systems?