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America's diverse Muslim communities were foisted into the spotlight, says Youssef Chouhoud, a political scientist at Virginia's Christopher Newport University.

"Your sense of who you were was becoming more formed, not just Muslim but American Muslim," he says. "What distinguished you as an American Muslim? Could you be fully both, or did you have to choose? There was a lot of grappling with what that meant."

In Hanif's case, there was no blueprint.

"Fifth-grader me wasn't naive or too young to know Muslims are in danger," she wrote in an essay about 9/11's aftermath. "...Flashing an American flag from our first-floor windows didn't make me more American."

A young Hanif gathered neighborhood friends to write a letter to then-President George W. Bush asking for protection.

"We knew," she says, "that we would become like warriors of this community."

But being warriors often carries a price.

Ishaq Pathan, 26, recalls when a boy told him he seemed angry and wondered if Pathan was going to blow up their Connecticut school.

He remembers feeling helpless when taken aside at an airport for additional questioning upon returning to the United States after a college semester in Morocco.

The agent looked through his belongings, including the laptop where he kept a private journal, and started reading it.

"I remember having tears in my eyes. I was completely and utterly powerless," says Pathan.

"You go to school with other people of different backgrounds and you realize ... what the promise of the United States is," he adds. "And when you see it not living up to that promise, then I think it instills in us a sense of wanting to help and fix that."

He now works as the San Francisco Bay Area director for the nonprofit Islamic Networks Group, trying to help younger generations grow confident in their Muslim identity.

Born in Somalia, Shukri Olow fled civil war with her family and lived in Kenyan refugee camps before eventually finding home in a public housing complex in Kent, south of Seattle.



