

Wall

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The Skanner News: Tell me about the '9/11 Unheard Voices' website. What is it?

Amardeep Singh: The website is a video wall that allows members of the Muslim, Sikh, Arab, South Asian communities to talk about discrimination against Arab communities as a result of 9/11. There's a belief that many of the stories of school bullying, racial profiling, hate crimes, employment discrimination, haven't been adequately captured by our government or the larger media, and this is an effort to take our stories and tell them ourselves and preserve them for posterity. That's really what the website's about.

TSN: And it looks like it's very graphics-driven, very accessible.

AS: Absolutely, so anyone can go on the site, and let's say you want to learn about how school bullying has affected members of our communities. There's a dropdown and you go to "school bullying." Same for "hate crimes" and "racial profiling" and the like.

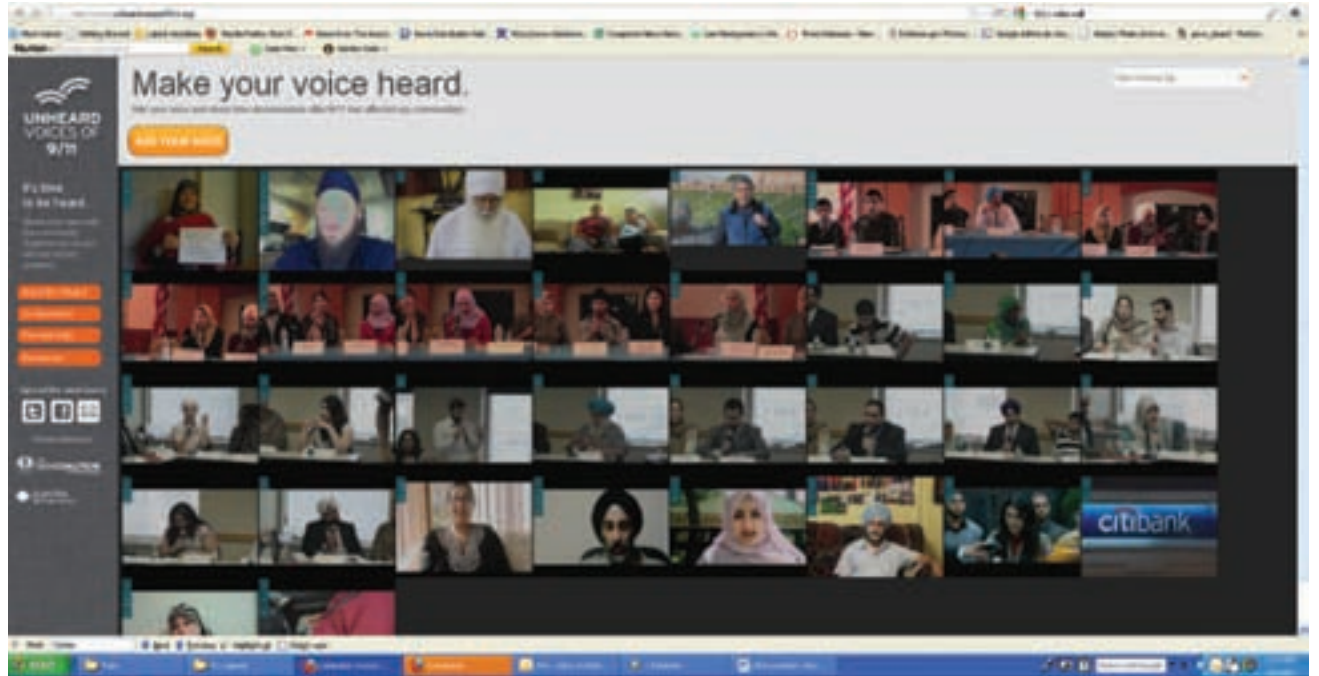
TSN: Talk a little bit about what you are seeing as you put this website together. What is the upshot of how people have been impacted since 9/11? What is the moral here?

AS: I think what's happened is right after the attack, the more open discrimination like hate crimes was prevalent. That has gone down markedly since the last 10 years. What has happened is you're seeing softer forms of discrimination like school bullying; the extra checks that members of the Sikh community get at the airport; the extra questioning that members of the Muslim community get at national borders. That has become not only prevalent, but has gotten worse since the attacks.

And I think the dynamic here is that while violent discrimination has gone down, the popular image in the public mind — for example, that equates a turban and beard with terrorism — has gotten worse. It's solidified. The last 10 years has been about taking that image of turban and beard and really driving home through popular media that this is the image of a terrorist. And of course as regards the Sikhs, a terrorism and beard have nothing to do with terrorism.

And what you end up seeing for example is our organization has done surveys of hundreds of young Sikh school students, both in the Bay Area and New York, and what's so disturbing about those surveys is that in both areas over 70 percent of turban-wearing boys report some sort of bullying, teasing, harassment, based on a supposed association with Osama bin Laden or the Taliban and the like. And over 30 percent on both coasts have been reporting unwanted physical touching or hitting.

These are crisis-level numbers and I think it's a reflection of what's happening — the dialogue that is happening among



The civil rights organization's "Unheard Voices of 9/11" invites community members to tell their own anecdotes of bullying, harassment, and just plain being singled out as "potential terrorists." Anyone impacted by such discrimination may upload their stories to the wall

the adults and the images that are out there of the turban and beard. There's just a lot of ignorance to still be dispelled 10 years out.

TSN: I know that in some of our other communities there's a sense of us versus them. And so how does it benefit everyone in the country to embrace this awareness of how people have been hurt by 9/11-related discrimination

Community members tell their own anecdotes of bullying, harassment, and just plain being singled out as 'potential terrorists'

in unintended ways? How does everybody benefit by what you're doing?

AS: It's important that we — I think a vast majority of Americans don't want discrimination in our midst. And the only way to resist this is to document it.

People just don't know; the only real way to address the issue is document it, to say this is happening. I know America doesn't like little children to be bullied, I know you don't like old men to be physically attacked. Let's put an end to this and the first step is to acknowledge that it's happening and to document it.

I think that the other thing this project does is it allows community members to speak in their own voice, and oftentimes when people see the faces — for example of the women in the hijab who is Muslim or a Sikh young boy or a man in a turban, there might be all sorts of assumptions about how they're going to speak. And when they get out there on the video wall on our website, and they're speaking for example without an accent because they were born and raised in this country, I think that helps to dispel a lot of myths also about our communities.

For example if somebody would get to know me they would know I was born and raised in the United States, I played little league baseball, my mom was a soccer mom, I'm a die-hard New York Yankees fan — when people tell me to go home I don't have anywhere to go except New Jersey, where I'm from. So I think this documentation project, done via video so that average people's voices can be heard, is just critical in putting forth that we have a problem here, and that it's a problem happening to good people who are just like anyone out there.

TSN: What's the most important thing that people should know about this project that you're doing?

AS: I think the most important thing is that the project engages in truth-telling about discrimination in our country, and that truth-telling will hopefully lead to dialogue and eventually change. But the project is about getting voices that haven't been heard, heard. So that the myths that are out there are hopefully dispelled.

Go to the website at <http://unheardvoicesof911.org/>

College

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year, joining more than 300 students in grades 10-12. All Portland high schools offer students the opportunity to take some college classes, and Jefferson students already have been crossing Killingsworth Street to take classes on the Cascade campus. But teachers and mentors are committed to helping more students make that journey and promise they will raise the bar, Calvert said.

"It's about expanding kids opportunities and seeing ways to get there — knowing that they are going to be surrounded by caring adults who are going to push them in a loving way."

The partnership between the schools and SEI is designed to help more Jefferson students aim higher, and offer them the support they need to achieve their goals. Portland Community College instructors and Jefferson teachers have been working closely together to make sure their academic language and content is consistent. Self Enhancement Inc. has committed to working with every student at the school, offering mentorship, and wraparound services designed to help students overcome the challenges they face.

Superintendent Smith said the elementary schools have been working hard to improve student's academic skills and it shows. About 50 percent of Jefferson students

arrived this year with below grade level test scores. That's far better than in previous years, where 80 percent arrived without the skills they needed. But it still means that many students will have a steep climb to get the scholarship.

Tony Hopson said SEI hopes eventually to work with every one of the students in Jefferson's feeder schools. At the moment SEI serves students who go to Humboldt

"They are struggling just to stay in school and to gain enough educational background, so they eventually can go across the street"

Tony Hopson

Middle school. Now SEI faces the new challenge of beginning work with student already halfway through their academic careers.

"...a large percentage of the kids who show up at Jefferson aren't prepared to go across the street to PCC or go down I5 to see the University of Oregon," Hopson said. "They are struggling just to stay in school and to gain enough educational background, so they eventually can go across the street.

"It doesn't start at Jefferson," he said. "We're going to do a much better job with students at schools in this cluster...."

"It would be a shame if the kids of color who are already living here can't take advantage of this opportunity, as opposed to 2 to 3 years of remedial work to get up to speed."

Nationally, Hopson noted, about one-third of students graduate from high school prepared for college; another third graduate unprepared for college; the remaining third don't graduate at all. Disproportionately these students are low-income Black and Latino students. A report by Eco Northwest for the Black Parent Initiative showed that those students do learn as fast as everyone else, but they face obstacles related to poverty, such as frequent changes of school.

Gatewood talked about the 'belief gap' that prevents many first-generation high school graduates from seeing themselves as university graduates. As a first generation student himself, he says, he understands that challenge. Attending classes at PCC gives students the experience of being a college student, he said, while the promise of financial aid makes it a real possibility.

"I truly believe that this partnership will get the job done," he said.

Lariviere agreed, saying that the steepest barriers is not to do with inborn intelligence or academic preparation or even self-discipline, but rather students' confidence and ability to thrive socially in an academic setting. Students at Jefferson will overcome that hurdle through their experiences at Portland Community College.

"The University of Oregon is often viewed as a place that's not accessible, that's not affordable; for the elite, harder to get into etcetera, and we are doing our best to overcome that belief," he said. "The biggest impediment to success for many, many young people is that they can't imagine themselves succeeding at the University of Oregon. The truth of the matter is that we are hungry for the opportunity for them to succeed."

Mayor Sam Adams, school board member Bobbie Regan, staff and students also contributed to the discussion. Adams said the city's cradle to career initiative would target help to pre-schoolers so they arrive at school ready to learn. Students, Bridgette Lang and Robel Haile said attending PCC classes has helped them set and achieve goals. Haile said that in Ethiopia, where he was born, high school graduation is out of range for most children. Now the Jefferson Varsity soccer captain believes he will go to university.