

Flying the hysterical skies

By Margaret Kimberley

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What happened on Northwest Airlines flight 327? The question has been on the lips of the press, public and punditry ever since the story was published on the website WomensWallStreet.com <http://www.womenswallstreet.com/WWS/article_landing.aspx?titleid=1&articleid=711>.

The author of the article, Annie Jacobsen, was traveling with her family from Detroit to Los Angeles on June 29, 2004. She and other passengers grew frightened when 14 Middle Eastern men behaved in what they felt was a “suspicious” manner during the flight. One gave her a “cold defiant look” and others went to the bathroom in succession. The crew shared Ms. Jacobsen’s alarm and dialed the airline equivalent of 911. When the plane landed in Los Angeles the FBI and other law enforcement personnel were on hand.

A subsequent search of the plane turned up nothing suspicious and it was later confirmed that the group of men were musicians on their way to a performance near Los Angeles. By now, however, the tale has been spread all across the Internet and on radio and television talk shows. It has become commonly accepted that the musicians were practicing for a terrorist attack or might have planted explosives on the aircraft.

September 11 made it easy to justify racial profiling and this story has bolstered the argument. Anyone who questions the practice is dismissed as “politically correct,” naive, or forgetful of the terror attack that took nearly 3,000 lives.

If it is acceptable to be queasy on a plane if a group of Arabs go to the bathroom on a three-hour flight it should also be acceptable to assume the worst about other groups. If Arabs can be automatically suspected of terrorism just because they are Arabs, then white people should be suspected of chicanery, thievery, and corruption, just because they are white. Paranoia is often justified, and we should not exclude any group from our own personal security alerts.

Richard Grasso was CEO of the New York Stock Exchange, which unbeknownst to all

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but a few, is a non-profit organization. Mr. Grasso was forced out of his job, but not before he convinced a passive board of powerful New York movers and shakers to give him an exit bonus totaling \$139 million.

When the startling sum was made public, Board Chairman H. Carl McCall, former Comptroller of New York – and the only African American ever elected to statewide office – was forced to resign due to the board's dereliction of duty. Not only has Mr. Grasso refused to return any of the money wrongly given to him but he has sued his successor, John Reed, for defamation because Reed had the gall to criticize the pay package.

The list of corruption, conflicts of interest and outright theft among the white, high and mighty is a long one indeed. Who bankrupted Enron? If one listens to those on the daily “perp walk” the culprit is a mystery. Ken Lay, a fund-raiser for George W. Bush, pleads ignorance. His cohorts who cashed in their chips before the bottom fell out on Enron employees and their 401(k)s are likewise clueless, even as they cut deals with prosecutors to get the shortest prison sentences possible.

Who worsened prescription drug coverage for retirees? It wasn't Arabs, terrorist or otherwise. It was white American politicians, lobbyists, pharmaceutical companies and a corrupted AARP. The recently-passed Medicare prescription drug package will not provide adequate coverage for needy seniors, but it also imperils coverage that millions of middle-class Americans already have.

If Arabs should be suspect while in flight, then white people should not be allowed near anyone's money. Taxpayers, shareholders, and workers have all been taken by the group that is most trusted but is the least worthy of anyone's trust. The United States is occupying Iraq, incurring the wrath of the Iraqi people and millions more around the world. The total of American soldiers killed in action now stands at 900. The Iraqi death toll is 11,000. Anyone who wanted payback for September 11 should be happy. The Iraqis have paid a very high price for the American desire for revenge.

Of course, powerful white people in executive suites brought this tragedy to fruition. They wanted to make lots and lots of money. So began a litany of no bid contracts, deals to transport oil to an oil-rich nation, jobs for non-Iraqis (while Iraqis look for work) and immunity from prosecution for any corporate wrongdoing.

To those who argue that we can't take a chance with suspicious Arabs, I say that we should be consistent. If we can profile in the airport we should profile in banks, board rooms and in the halls of Congress. White people should be banned from involvement in any transactions involving large sums of money. If every Arab can be a presumed Mohammed Atta, then every white man should be a presumed Richard Grasso or Ken Lay. Let's have racial profiling everywhere in America. We will all feel a lot safer.