

See Something, Say Something

Ever since the 9/11 attacks, Susan has feared Muslim extremists. She knows that this fear is unwarranted and that it contributes to an anti-Muslim bias, and she makes an effort not to let this bias affect her judgment. However, she also knows that this bias still does affect her judgment to a degree. For example, she knows that traveling through airports brings out her paranoia, and she recognizes that this is happening right now as she walks into the airport to board a flight. Susan recalls seeing President Obama on news saying, "If you see something, say something,"¹ the slogan for Homeland Security.² She also recalls tips about how to look for suspicious activity that she saw on TV news.

As Susan walks through the security line, she notices that the TSA screener is preoccupied and not paying close attention as a man in a turban makes his way through the line. Susan, despite her best efforts not to, finds herself keeping an eye on this man as he prepares to board his flight. During this time Susan observes the man fidgeting, looking around anxiously, and checking the contents of his bag. When Susan sees the man leave his bag unattended near the gate and disappear around the corner, she starts to worry. She tells herself, "I don't know if this person is a terrorist, but he might be, and if he is then hundreds of people could be in danger. So maybe I should err on the side of caution and say something."

Still, in the back of her mind, Susan feels real doubt. She knows that she can't trust herself to be objective about these matters. If this person dressed differently, Susan might not have noticed him at all. Susan also realizes that racial, ethnic, and religious minorities have greater reason to feel anxious at the airport than she does, and that if she says something, then an innocent man could experience real hardship, perhaps including missing his flight and enduring hours of interrogation as a result.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What should Susan do?
2. Is Susan blameworthy for having an anti-Muslim bias even though she makes an effort not to? Why or why not?
3. Is racial, ethnic, or religious profiling ever morally permissible? Why or why not?

¹ <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/11/25/obama-tries-to-reassure-americans-if-you-see-something-suspicious-say-something/>

² <http://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>