

# Bombing rattles American detained because of color

The Los Angeles Times

He was just an ordinary guy packing for a flight and trying to find his socks before kissing the kids goodbye and racing to the airport.

Then a bomb exploded in Oklahoma City.

He was held by police in Chicago. Because his skin is brown.

And his name is Ibrahim Abdullah Hassan Ahmad.

"That's the sad thing," he said Wednesday. "I'm sure that hundreds of people left Oklahoma City that day, but I was the only one stopped.

"Because of my looks. It doesn't matter what citizenship you're carrying."

His citizenship, incidentally, is American.

## Never a suspect

From a love of the country he adopted in 1982, he has Americanized his name to Abraham Ahmad. Forty-eight hours after the bombing, FBI Director Louis Freeh said Ahmad was never a suspect.

It didn't matter.

"After somebody released my name and address, a lot of people came by my house and threw trash, empty cans and napkins and stuff like that," he said, shortly after leaving a Washington news conference sponsored by the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Ahmad, 32, has worked in restaurants and for a computer manufacturer. He is unemployed but hoping to build a business exporting American goods to Jordan, where he was born.

## Wrong time

He acknowledges that soon after 9:02 a.m. on April 19, he was coming from precisely the right place at precisely the wrong time. He agrees that he fits an established profile based on previous terrorism: having an Islamic-sounding name, being a male between 20 and 40, and traveling alone

to the Middle East.

"But to stop people just because of their origin, their color, that's a very good example that something is wrong," he said.

Ahmad knew nothing of the bombing when his American Airlines flight from Will

Rogers World Airport landed in Chicago. He was stopped by police groping for suspects while walking to his Alitalia jet to Rome, continuing to Amman, Jordan. He was released after FBI questioning, missed that flight, but worked an alternate connection.

Then the FBI thought of more questions. Ahmad was stopped again in London and returned to the United States for further interrogation.

## Rumor mill churns

By this time, speculation was rampant. Middle East terrorists were rumored to be responsible for the bombing. And a rumor leaked that bomb-making materials were found in Ahmad's luggage.

"They were talking about the wire," Ahmad explained. "I had a VCR and a telephone fax machine and the wires which go for these things."

Ahmad's wife, Martina, and daughters — Sanna, 5, and Nesreen, 2 — have all been caught in the tumult.

"They were astonished by this," he said. "My 5-year-old, the one who can understand what is going on, she has been crying like her mother, and asking why, why there's a lot of people around the house."

Ahmad is not relishing his elevation from local nobody to global figure. Especially the momentary infamy of being viewed as one of the world's deadliest terrorists.

But no matter the backlash, he said he will live with it. The hatred of some Americans will not damage his devotion to all Americans.

He says, "I love this country. You can make it here and be whoever you want to be."

**OKLAHOMA CITY  
BOMBING**

