



**Los Angeles Times**  
**ORANGE COUNTY EDITION**

Monday, March 10, 2003

## All of Us Must Fight Bigotry

**P**etty rivalries and stupidity may have prompted a pack of young men to viciously beat an 18-year-old Arab American in Yorba Linda. Or, the Feb. 22 attack that left Rashid Alam hospitalized with a broken jaw might have been triggered by racist ignorance.

This much is clear: About 30 young men, some swinging bats, a golf club or beer bottles, gathered on a residential street late on a Saturday night. The ensuing fight was peppered with shouts of "white power." Alam ended up in the hospital, two teenagers were held on misdemeanor charges and other arrests are imminent.

Police are investigating the incident as a possible hate crime — a charge that occurs when prejudice against the victim plays a substantial factor in the commission of the crime. Whatever motivated the Feb. 22 crime, authorities should use it as impetus for an aggressive campaign to prevent violence against Arab Americans as war looms in Iraq.

The FBI agreed to monitor the investigation after Alam's family complained that local police were failing to give crimes against Muslims the same treatment as crimes

against others. On that front, law enforcement must conduct a thorough and open investigation.

Meanwhile, educators must communicate with students to fend off possible acts of retribution at the Anaheim high school where some of those involved are students. "These things tend to simmer and bubble up unless you have an administration or school district that moves quickly," said Joe Hicks, vice president of Los Angeles-based Community Advocates, which works to improve race relations.

Southern Californians also can turn to institutions created during other difficult times. The Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission was established after the 1965 Watts riots and the Orange County Human Rights Commission was formed in 1971 to ease strained relations between law enforcement and the county's African American and Latino communities.

Government, though, can do only so much to eradicate hate. Southern Californians can move toward greater harmony by refusing to allow bigotry to fester in their homes, campuses and places of employment.