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Trends. Racism, Racial Profiling, and Espionage: Wen Ho Lee as Victim?

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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According to The New York Times, the former head of counterintelligence at Los Alamos National Laboratory has suggested racist overtones in the identification of Wen Ho Lee--a Taiwan-born scientist--as a prime (even the only) suspect in an espionage investigation at Los Alamos. The suggestion is based on the contention that other Los Alamos personnel who are not of Asian ancestry and who manifested at least some similar problematic behaviors--e.g., meeting with various representatives of the People's Republic of China--were not seriously considered as suspects. Moreover, other sources of suspects besides Los Alamos--viz., civilian contractors and the Department of Defense--were allegedly ignored or discounted.

Assuming the allegations that suggest racism are correct, one must not instinctively jettison racial factors in personnel security and counterintelligence matters. The fact is that such factors may have significant interpretive value in specific situations for specific people. (For example, a Caucasian from Iowa might be a likely suspect in committing espionage for a hostile nation-state, at least partially because the individual is not congruent with the primary racial characteristics of that nation-state. Or a self-perception of one's race can lead to a susceptibility for espionage regardless of what that race may be.) On the other hand, a problem does lie in developing intelligence policy and decisions based on stereotypes.

The comments of the former counterintelligence official may be no more than a defense against personnel and legal action for an intelligence failure. However, the phenomenon of racism remains one that can be operative in security deliberations and must be attenuated without removing the potential value of racial characteristics. (See Broad, W. (August 18, 1999). Bias is called key to naming suspect in China spy case. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A18; Flecha, R. (1999). Modern and postmodern racism in Europe: Dialogic approach and anti-racist pedagogies. *Harvard Educational Review*, 69, 150-171; Foster, D. (1999). Racism, Marxism, psychology. *Theory and Psychology*, 9, 331-352; Hopkins, N., Reicher, S., & Levine, M. (1997). On the parallels between social cognition and the "new racism." *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 36, 305-329; Jeanquart-Barone, S., & Sekaran, U. (1996). Institutional racism: An empirical study. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 136, 477-482.) (Keywords: Counterintelligence, Espionage, Racial Profiling, Racism, Security.)