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Does the Right View Muslims as Equal Citizens?

By Ibrahim Hooper
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Given the political right's hate-filled and hysterical response to all things Muslim, one has to ask whether American Muslims face a future in which they will no longer be treated as equal citizens.

The best example of the right's campaign to deprive American Muslims of the civil liberties enjoyed by citizens of other faiths is the neo-McCarthyite response to a planned Islamic cultural center in New York City.

Newt Gingrich, who fancies himself a possible 2012 presidential candidate, [justifies his opposition](#) to the New York Islamic center because "America is experiencing an Islamist cultural-political offensive designed to undermine and destroy our civilization."

He would bar a mosque "near Ground Zero in New York so long as there are no churches or synagogues in Saudi Arabia" -- as if the constitutionally-protected religious rights of Americans depend on the actions of a foreign government.

Sarah Palin, another GOP presidential hopeful, calls the New York Islamic center a stab in the heart of all Americans and an "unnecessary provocation" that all "peaceful Muslims" must "refudiate [sic]."

Not to be outdone in Islamophobic rhetoric, [New York gubernatorial candidate Carl Paladino](#) said that, if elected, he would use the power of eminent domain to stop the building of the Islamic center.

Paladino did not explain how this maneuver would pass muster under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000, which states: "No government shall impose or implement a land use regulation that discriminates against any assembly or institution on the basis of religion or religious denomination."

[Rick Lazio](#), another New York gubernatorial candidate, even has a petition on his campaign website calling on visitors to "Defend New York" from the planned Islamic center. One wonders how the city has managed to defend itself from another mosque that has been in that same neighborhood for 27 years.

But for all out loony tunes bigotry, American Muslims can always count on Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy for some 1930s style minority-bashing.

Gaffney, who was recently [slammed by Rachel Maddow](#) for the anti-Muslim conspiracy theories he promotes, is hyping a 1-minute video claiming the New York Islamic center would "defile Ground Zero with a beachhead for shariah."

But what else could be expected of an individual who claims an American Muslim is committing an act of "sedition" merely for believing in Islamic law and employs a staff attorney, David Yerushalmi, who heads a group that has advocated prison terms for "adherence to Islam"?

In a 2007 commentary, Yerushalmi called for a "war against Islam and all Muslim faithful."

He wrote in part: "At a practical level, this means that Shari'a and Islamic law are immediately outlawed. Any Moslem in America who adopts historical and traditional Shari'a will be subject to deportation. Mosques which adhere to Islamic law will be shut down permanently."

Why is all this bigotry and hatred being employed to stop the construction of a community center that will house recreational and banquet facilities, meeting rooms, an auditorium -- and yes, a prayer space for Muslims and people of other faiths?

Unfortunately, there is a vocal minority in our nation whose lives are dedicated to marginalizing American Muslims and demonizing Islam.

The techniques these individuals and groups use to promote Islamophobia may vary - whether it is a Florida church promoting "[International Burn a Koran Day](#)" on September 11, [a bizarre ballot measure in Oklahoma](#) that would bar judges from considering Islamic law in their rulings, ACT! for America seeking to insert [anti-Islam materials in school curricula](#), or [Stop the Islamization of America's anti-Islam bus and taxi ad campaigns](#) -- but they all agree on the ultimate goal of denying American Muslim their full rights as citizens.

Some Islamophobes would even deny American Muslims the most fundamental right -- the right to life. A recent post on a blog hosted by David Horowitz carried the genocidal headline, "[It's Time to Put the Coffee Down and Eradicate Islam in the West.](#)"

Religious and political leaders who believe in the traditional American values of tolerance and mutual respect should stand up and state clearly that all of our nation's citizens, including Muslims, have the right to decide how and where they will worship.

The constitutional rights of American Muslims must not be left in the hands of those who exploit and promote fear of the "other" and use the same divisive tactics that have harmed so many other societies throughout history.

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