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Jews Must Repudiate All Hatred, Especially From One of Their Own

Media Mention of Hussein Ibish in The Huffington Post - June 25, 2012 - 11:00pm
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-levin-jd/jews-must-repudiate-all-h_b_1625925... [1]

Pamela Geller, an outspoken Islamophobe who spins wild hateful conspiracy theories about Muslims, as well as President Obama, had a speaking event entitled "*Islamic Jew Hatred: The Root Cause of the Failure to Achieve Peace*" cancelled in Los Angeles over the weekend following condemnation by a number of local advocacy groups. The speech sponsored by the Zionist Organization of America was terminated after the venue owner, the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, intervened to prevent its tenant from hosting the controversial speaker.

Hussein Ibish, an award winning commentator on interfaith relations has stated:

Pamela Geller is without question one of the most enthusiastic purveyors of hate speech in the United States, and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles is to be congratulated.... Of course the appropriate response to hate speech is constructive speech, but organizations that are or wish to be respectable have an obligation not to treat hate speech as legitimate contributions to our national conversation. They are not.

Geller, a stylish, media savvy commentator and author has achieved international notoriety for her blog, media appearances, and speaking engagements that relentlessly pursue the theme of Islamic domination of the United States and elsewhere. She also promotes the theme that America is being corrupted by an evil President Obama, bent on following the nefarious religious agenda of Muslim overlords. An organization that she reinvigorated with Robert Spencer, Stop Islamization of America (SOIA) was declared a hate group in 2010 by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a designation each vigorously opposes. Among the group's works are protesting mosques, buying bus ads urging Muslims to abandon their faith, and opposing the imposition of Sharia law in the United States.

Her website Atlas Shrugs, has unleashed the contentions that:

- President Obama is the illegitimate child of Malcolm X,

- had a sexual affair with a "crack whore",
- "wants jihad to win",
- he was not born in the United States,
- he never repudiated his Muslim faith,
- and that the raid on the bin Laden compound was carried out by a coup over the President's refusal.

Geller wrote on her blog:

The media can spin their subjugation and adulation a million different ways, but America did not vote for a "Muslim presidency," which is what this is. Everything this president has done so far has helped foster America's submission to Islam.

However, what catapulted Geller firmly into mainstream notoriety was her exploitation of the unpopular proposal to build an Islamic Center in downtown Manhattan, which she maintained was a Ground Zero trophy "victory" mosque:

I'll call it a monster mosque too. It is. It is. And you cannot discount or avoid the fact that it is an Islamic pattern to build triumphal mosques on the cherished sites of conquered lands. Now you could say to me, "Do you really believe that this?" I am telling you that is how it will be perceived in the Muslim world, period. What one schmuck on Broadway thinks is irrelevant. It will be iconic to the jihad. It will be the icon, it will be the icon.

A central theme to her anti-Islamic views is the position that true Islam today is a homogenous political enterprise bent on applying Sharia law to dominate and oppress non-Muslims in both Europe and the United States. As she told the *New York Times*:

And I don't think that many westernized Muslims know when they pray five times a day that they're cursing Christians and Jews five times a day. I don't think they know that.... Oh, I believe in the idea of a moderate Muslim. I do not believe in the idea of a moderate Islam.... I think a moderate Muslim is a secular Muslim.

She was cited approvingly one dozen times in the 1500 page Islamophobic manifesto of accused Norway massacre killer Andres Brevick. She also has friendly ties to arguably Europe's most notorious Islamophobe, Dutch politician Gert Wilders, who stated, "the Koran is a book that calls for hatred, violence, murder, terrorism, war and submission." He also urged a forced assimilation contract, a ban on new mosques, anti-Muslim immigration laws and a closure of Muslim schools.

Coarseness Is Pervasive in Public Discourse

While the most obvious aspect of this controversy and a primary focus of this article is that an unrepentant, odious bigot had a speaking event from a mainstream group cancelled, there are

some contextual facts that are also worth mentioning.

It is a sad, but not particularly surprising, commentary on the state of public discourse that conspiratorial tainted flamethrowers like Geller have significant traction at all, particularly with mainstream groups. Fareed Zakaria noted, "A cottage industry of scaremongering has flourished in the West -- especially in the United States since 9/11." Geller's toxic combative style has been mainstreamed by political commentators, like Keith Olbermann, Donald Trump, Neil Munro, Ann Coulter, Congressional candidate Charles Barron and Rush Limbaugh. This in your face style has also been replicated by entertainers like Charlie Sheen, Rosie O'Donnell and Howard Stern. Like Kim Kardashian, Geller, who once famously video blogged in a bikini, has also leveraged her sense of glamor as part of her relentless self promotion.

However, it would be wrong to merely suggest that bombast and style are solely responsible for her successful mainstream incursions. Like Glenn Beck, David Duke and Jesse Helms, her routine invocation of actual facts and events, are done in such a way as to cast the widest conspiratorial net and invoke the greatest fear possible. Moreover, to her supporters, she has great credibility, because both our education system and the newsmedia is ceding to the unrestrained blogosphere their previous role as a trusted purveyor of genuine information and perhaps more importantly, context. For instance when recent rocket attacks on Southern Israel and the prosecution of two important domestic criminal cases involving radical Muslim extremists received scant coverage, it offered an opening for bloggers who can gain credibility merely by covering the stories in the first place. Also important to this discussion is the decline of long form investigative journalism in the United States due to a shift in economics and popular taste. This too, leaves a vacuum for biased extremist commentators like Geller and her compatriots to fill in the blanks on the state of religion and extremism in America.

All Sides Share Blame and Responsibility

To our collective discredit, for many on different sides of the religious or political divide, the most sought after tutors to a factually challenged and polarized constituency are not the most literate, but simply the most loud or divisive. Their echoes are further amplified by an increasingly self-selected and closed informational ecosystem fueled by fear. The *New York Times* pointed out that Geller operates "largely outside traditional Washington power centers-- and for better or worse, without traditional, academic, public policy or journalism credentials." For a scared and deeply distrustful constituency that Palinesque lack of credentialed formality in both her background and her public statements is a plus, a testament to her authenticity. She also channels Coulter and Malkin's bluntness with a derisive lexicon that pegs adversaries as facists, thugs, whores and lowlifes.

To be sure, each Abrahamic religious community in America is guilty of pandering to bigots or other missteps. Muslim organizations, including CAIR (who also ironically protested Geller's invite), have over the past decade invited Nazi Al Baker, formerly a top leader in one of the Holocaust museum shooter's old hate groups to speak, as well as anti-Semite Abdel Malik Ali. Ali's lectures blame Zionist Jews and the U.S. government for the 9/11 attacks and contend that the Matthew Shepard-James Byrd federal hate crime law is a plot to criminalize discussion of the "disproportionate numbers of Jews, Zionist Jews, in the media, in finance and foreign policy..." In addition, some Muslim groups have recklessly slung the title of Islamophobe or hater to legitimate commentators who raised legitimate questions about their positions, thereby undermining their credibility when a genuine bigot enters the stage.

Pat Robertson broadcast on national television a view of Islam that sounds a lot like Geller's:

If we don't stop covering up what Islam is, Islam is a violent, I was going to say religion, but it's not a religion. It's a political system, it's a violent political system, bent on the overthrow of the governments of the world and world domination. That is the ultimate aim and they talk about infidels and all this but the truth is that's what the game is. So you're dealing with a, not with a religion, you're dealing with a political system and I think we should treat it as such. And treat its adherents as such as we would members of the Communist Party or members of some fascist group.

The First Amendment Protects Haters and Our Right To Reject Them

These are important times for lectures on power shifts in the Middle East, Israel's security, the peace process, the continued promotion of anti-Semitism under the guise of criticism of Israel, the conspicuous Iranian nuclear efforts, as well as the continuing significant threat that even a degraded al Qaeda and its followers pose to the West. Perhaps the ZOA should have invited Fareed Zakaria to speak with a slightly different perspective. He observes that violent hateful radicals do exist in a slowly modernizing Muslim world where complexities are often left out of analysis: "The reactionaries in the world of Islam are more numerous and extreme than those in other cultures--that world does have its dysfunctions. But they remain a tiny minority of the billion plus Muslims."

The First Amendment gives Geller a soapbox on the Internet and the lecture circuit, but it also gives responsible organizations the choice not to give a platform to or associate with bigots. As Dr. Ibish rightly observes, "The appropriate response to hate speech is constructive speech, but organizations that are or wish to be respectable have an obligation not to treat hate speech as legitimate contributions to our national conversation. They are not."

Free speech rightfully protects even conspiratorial haters to exploit fears from stereotypes, and animus from half truths. It also requires that people of good will completely repudiate such contemptible manifestations of Islamophobia in the strongest terms possible. In the past I have vigorously criticized Muslim organizations (without hearing much from them) and those on the left and in academia for promoting or tolerating anti-Semitism. Jewish organizations who themselves have combatted anti-Semitism have a special moral obligation to make it known that religious bigotry, especially under the mantle of expediency or fear, is a unique toxin that poisons the lifeblood of all civilized pluralistic societies.

President George Washington's reflections to Jews from over two centuries ago in a letter to Rhode Island's Touro Synagogue are as true now as they were then:

For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens....May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.

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