



LEADERSHIP IN THE FACE OF RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY

A RESOURCE FOR CAMPUS LEADERS

This resource was developed by the Interfaith Youth Core to equip campus leaders to address issues prompted by the controversy around the Park 51 community center and the associated rising anti-Muslim bigotry. By taking appropriate action to promote inclusion, America's college and universities can help illustrate how the arc of the United States bends towards justice and reveal that as a nation, we are better together.

INTRODUCTION

As students return to campus this fall, a divisive debate on religion continues to dominate the national conversation. While the site of the proposed community center in lower Manhattan may seem distant from most of our campuses, the controversy surrounding Park 51 has affected communities from California to Tennessee, Florida to Wisconsin.

In the face of the anti-Muslim bigotry sweeping the country, we are all called to act. For campus leaders – administrators, students, staff and faculty – the questions of intolerance versus inclusion are inextricable from the charge to shape and educate global citizens.

Campus leaders must consider how these events will impact the student body.

In the face of intolerance, the arc of American history has bent toward freedom and inclusion of all – but this arc isn't inevitable.

To realize this arc, we must:

1. GET INFORMED about what's at stake.
2. SPEAK OUT, transforming prejudice into pluralism.
3. MOBILIZE people, knowledge and resources toward building interfaith cooperation.

THE HEADLINES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES ...



Washington Post

"Hostility around U.S. Jars Muslim College Students."



New York Times

"Student Arraigned in Anti-Muslim Stabbing of Cabdriver"

"Across Nation, Mosque Projects Meet Opposition"

"Tennessee Official Says Islam May be a Cult"



Time Magazine

"Islamophobia: Does America Have a Muslim Problem?"



CNN

"Five Teens Charged with Disrupting Muslim Services"

"Preacher Wants to Burn Qurans"

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GET INFORMED

- a. Inclusion and Intolerance
- b. Getting the "Us vs Them" Right
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SPEAK OUT AND MOBILIZE

- a. Taking action: Administrators, Faculty, and Staff
- b. Taking action: Student Leaders
- c. Building the Movement

Appendix: Key Resources



STAND UP

July 26, Bob Roberts, Dr. Joel Hunter and other evangelical leaders write *Washington Post* blogs asserting the commitment to religious pluralism and supporting the Muslim community.

May 25, New York City's Community Board 1 unanimously approves the building of community center at Park51 site.

Aug., New York City's Landmark Presevation Committee unanimously votes that Park 51 is not a landmark and building can proceed.

MAY

JULY

SPEAK OUT

Aug. 3, New York City, Mayor Bloomberg:
"Of all our precious freedoms, the most important is the freedom to worship as we wish ... The nation was founded on the principle that government must never choose between religions."

Aug. 21, Over 70 interfaith leaders in Southern California sign a statement against "hate speech" targeting Muslim Americans and supporting "a more perfect pluralism."

Aug. 26, Dozens Gainesville, FL faith leaders sign a statement against "Burn a Quran Day"
"The act of burning the sacred scripture of Islam has no place in our faith, our religious communities, our town, or in our nation."

AUGUST

May 7, The organization Stop the Islamization of America, fueled by anti-Muslim sentiment launches "Campaign Offensive: Stop 911 Mosque."

May 11, The Islamic Center of Northeast Florida is firebomed with 60 people inside.

July 14, Tennessee Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey:
"You could even argue whether being a Muslim is actually a religion or is it a nationality, way of life of a cult, whatever you want to call it."

Aug. 3, Newt Gingrich:
"Nazis don't have the right to put up a sign next to the Holocaust Museum in Washington ... There is no reason for us to accept a mosque next to the World Trade Center."

INTOLERANCE

*For additional information on these events see the appendix on page 21.

Aug. 19, Anti-mosque protesters in Temecula, CA bring dogs to offend Muslim beliefs.

Aug. 9, Mosque picketed in Bridgeport, CT.

Aug., Anti-mosque protesters launch campaign against proposed site in Florence, KY.

Aug., Pastor Terry Jones, in Gainesville, FL promotes "Burn a Quran Day" in mainstream media.

Aug. 30, Arson occurs at the site of a planned mosque in Murfreesboro, TN.

Aug. 23, A non-Muslim man is mobbed by Park51 protesters, who assume he is Muslim based on his clothing.

Aug. 25, Cab driver in NYC is repeatedly stabbed in the throat after his passenger asks "Are you Muslim?"

VITRIOL

VIOLENCE

GETTING THE "US VS. THEM" RIGHT

The forces of intolerance in America are adept at spreading messages of division, which have centered on marginalizing the American Muslim community. The forces of inclusion must respond with messages of pluralism and spread a vision of interfaith cooperation.

The "Us vs. Them" is not Americans versus Muslims. It is Americans of all religious, non-religious and philosophical traditions united against violent extremism.

Here are some messages of division we've seen recently being used to divide our communities – but they don't reflect the values of pluralism, inclusion and cooperation that define our nation.

We must advance alternative messages that spread the vision of unity and promote our values.

IN AMERICA, WE DON'T DISCRIMINATE AGAINST PEOPLE OF ANY RELIGION.

IN AMERICA, WE WILL NOT BE DIVIDED BY FAITH.

IN AMERICA, EVERYONE HAS A PLACE.

IN AMERICA, WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER.

DIVIDE

1. America is under attack; our religious diversity is a threat.
2. Islam is infiltrating America.
3. Muslims cannot be Americans. Islam and the West are fated to fight.
4. There is no such thing as a moderate Muslim. All Muslims could be terrorists.
5. 9/11 stands for Islam.
6. It is insensitive of those who were brutally killed on 9/11 to build a mosque so close to Ground Zero.

UNITE

1. The dream of America is people from different backgrounds living together in equal dignity and mutual loyalty. We must realize this dream together.
2. Today, Muslims contribute to the civic fabric of America as other new Americans have in the past. (Compare this to the integration of Catholic and Jewish communities in the 19th-20th centuries. See Eboo Patel's *USA Today* op-ed in the Appendix for more).
3. Islam and America hold shared values, such as pluralism and cooperation.
4. Muslim Americans are peaceful, hardworking citizens. The actions of a radical few extremists have hijacked the religion for their ends.
5. 9/11 was an act of terrorism by extremists. Extremists of all traditions belong to the same tradition: the tradition of extremism.
6. Muslim Americans were among those who perished and who lost loved ones on 9/11, and our Muslim American neighbors have no relation to the terrorists who attacked our nation on 9/11. We honor the sacrifice of those who died by keeping alive the values that the terrorists sought to attack – freedom, pluralism and equality.

PLURALISM: OUR COMMON HISTORY

GEORGE WASHINGTON, addressing the Hebrew Congregation in 1790, spoke:

“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 fig-tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, in his 1793 autobiography, said it was vital that, “Even if the Mufti [Islamic scholar of the law] of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism [Islam] to us, he would find a pulpit at his service.”

REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., in a speech before the Nobel Peace Prize Commission in 1964:

“We have inherited a large house, a great ‘world house’ in which we have to live together -- black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu -- a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.”

FORMER PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, speaking at the Islamic Center in Washington, DC in the wake of September 11, 2001:

“The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace.”

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, at the Inaugural Address on January 21, 2009, asserts:

“For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers...” And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that... as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.”

