I was on a "Politics in SF" panel at Dragon*Con which once more convinced me that a lot of people should've been made to read "The Man Without a Country" a few more times. Though, with the sneering generation (Baby Boomers, starting a year after my unnamed contingent, were spectacularly good sneerers) that probably would not have had the desired effect...*my* desired effect, at least, which would be to remind people that the person with no loyalty to anything but his/her own pleasure is not a noble hero of individualism, but a pathetic failure as a human being.

There is, of course, more than one way to be a failure as a human being, but this is a form of failure very popular at the moment and--as it has considerable power to make others miserable--it's one I'm particularly aware of right now. One of the loudest (actually THE loudest) voices on the panel blared at one point "The business of business is profit." Well...yes. But that doesn't mean that the business of business is smart, or useful to the country, when business is granted the rights of a citizen but not the responsibility.

Because citizens have another business, besides whatever pays their rent...the business of a citizen is the welfare of the nation.

The definition of "success" for a business may be rising stock prices, or increased sales...but the definition of success for a citizen has nothing to do with stock prices or corporate income...a citizen is a success--as a citizen--inasmuch as that individual makes things better. It does not matter how: a parent who conveys to their children the responsibility of citizenship--that the world is not their bowl of cherries, but everyone's bowl of cherries, that they owe something to the society that nurtured them--that parent is a success as a citizen. The honest shopkeeper, the honest craftsperson, the honest teacher, the honest tradesperon, the honest truckdriver; those who obey the laws and make roads safer by their driving or make neighborhoods safer by their cooperation; those who volunteer for tasks like ambulance work or mentoring kids or working in food pantries: these are all doing what successful citizens do...they are supporting the social and cultural infrastructure that supports them.

What distinguishes the unsuccessful citizen? Some old-fashioned vices: greed, dishonesty, laziness, selfishness, cruelty, anger/resentment/, refusal to take responsibility for his/her own acts and their consequences. Anything that degrades the resources of the nation--including the human resources needed for a healthy society--anything that harms the nation--brands those who do it as unsuccessful, bad, citizens. When a construction firm uses substandard materials to
build that highway or bridge or apartment building...that's being a bad citizen, and no amount of
donations to a political candidate--or even a university--can undo the damage done to the fabric
of trust that underlies healthy societies. When a member of the armed forces uses supplies for
personal gain--or fails to learn his/her job and carry out his/her duties with dispatch--or does
anything that reflects badly on the service--that's damage done to public trust and/or to the
reputation of the nation. When a policeman or jail guard rapes a prisoner...when a judge rules in
favor of a corporation in which he owns stock...when a company fires the employees in its own
nation and hires cheaper labor elsewhere...that's damage done to the fabric of the nation. And
that's being a bad citizen.

This nation was founded with an overt appeal to universal rights of mankind--those stated (but
not stated to be all) being life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But the survival of this
nation depended then, and has depended since, on citizens taking responsibility, not just liberty,
as one of the rights of mankind. Had the signers of the Declaration been as wedded to personal
liberty as the right wing today, there would have been no successful Revolution. For these men,
who pledged their "lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor" to the cause, did not want total
freedom for themselves--they did not demand that others bear the burdens so they could ride in
the well-sprung coach. They were familiar with, and based their concept of citizenship on,
ancient understanding of citizenship--that courage/fortitude, integrity, temperance, sound
judgment were all desirable virtues which, if held by all citizens, would knit together a culture
otherwise tolerant of diversity. They knew enough of human nature to know that no nation had
yet achieved such a citizenry--that it was unlikely to exist in future even with the best
possibilities--but they knew it was worth trying for.

And they knew it would take personal sacrifice--first their own, which they were willing to
make--and then, in succeeding generations, more of the same. They knew--which too many
now do not--that risking one's physical life in combat or a dangerous public service is not the
only sacrifice necessary to make and preserve a sound nation. Any society depends on
contributors, not just takers...those who grow the crops of food and fiber, those who make the
tools and those who use them, those who bear and support and teach and train the young who
will carry on the work as adults. Society must benefit them, not just those who skim off a profit
from their work. Yes, a large and complex society needs a more complex social and financial
structure--but a structure that increases the gap between rich and poor--that ignores or
devalues the contributions of the poor and middle-class--is a society that creates bad citizens by
its very structure.

When a rich man, like Ken Lay of Enron, can claim that he has suffered more than the low-level
employees of the company because he's lost more money (his wealth going down from hundreds
of millions to only 20-something millions)--when he can spend his pre-sentencing time at his
luxurious home in Aspen with his family, while a poor man will spend his pre-sentencing time in
jail--the system is obviously creating bad citizens. When a President's wife (Laura Bush) publicly
announces that she and her husband have suffered more from the war than anyone else--a
statement I'm sure most brain-injured and amputee vets and their families would take issue
with--and then retire to a cushy Dallas home and a cushy central Texas ranch--with a big estate
in Patagonia waiting should they wish--we have an excellent example of citizenship failure right
at the top. With greater power and wealth should come greater responsibility and
accountability.

Which brings me, on this particular day, to the aftermaths of 9/11. And, in line with that, the
vexed question of the Islamic memorial site and the responsibilities of immigrant citizens in
We have always had trouble with immigrants (the native peoples had the most troubles with immigrants!) Every new group that landed on the shore was greeted with distrust (and often responded badly) until it showed that it was willing and able to contribute something those already here wanted. The most successful, in terms of acceptance, endured decades of distrust and discrimination and then turned on newer immigrants the same attitudes that had so angered them. (Last fall I talked with a man on the train whose parents had been Italian immigrants...he was vehemently denouncing Hispanic immigrants using exactly the same complaints that were used against Italians earlier: dirty, lazy, violent, etc.)

Public schooling was viewed as a way to educate immigrant children into the existing American culture--to break down their "native" culture and avoid the kind of culture clashes (between religions and national origins) people brought with them from the old country. Refusal to send children to public schools was once considered a refusal of the duties of citizenship (this changed in the '60s/'70s, with the white flight from public schools as an attempt was made to create racial balance.) English-language-only instruction was one method used--there was to be one language all citizens understood, so that anyone from any background could communicate with anyone else...to avoid the tight little enclaves that people naturally retreat to because it's more comfortable. Was this ideal? No, but in a couple of generations, nearly all immigrants' grandchildren were able to speak English, even if their kids dropped out of school.

The point here is that in order to accept large numbers of immigrants, and maintain any social cohesion, acceptance by the receiving population is not the only requirement: immigrants must be willing and able to change, to merge with the receiving population. The new place isn't the old place; the new customs aren't the old customs. "Acceptance" is a multi-directional communications grid. Groups that self-isolate, that determinedly distinguish themselves by location, by language, by dress, will not be accepted as readily as those that plunge into the mainstream. This is not just an American problem--this is human nature, the tribalism that underlies all societies and must be constantly curtailed if larger groups are to co-exist. It is natural to want to be around those who talk like you, eat the familiar foods, wear the familiar clothes, have the familiar cultural references. But in a multicultural society like ours--and it has been multi-cultural from its inception--citizens need to go beyond nature. That includes those who by their history find it least comfortable.

Whether a group changes its core behaviors and values after immigration or not, it must--to be assimilated later--come to understand the culture into which it has moved. To get along, it must try not to do those things which will, sure as eggs is eggs, create friction, distrust, and dislike. Is this a limitation on its freedom? Yes. It is also a limitation on the freedom of the existing culture into which it moves...it's a compromise. A compromise isn't entirely comfortable to either side, and either side may misjudge how uncomfortable a compromise is to the other side--it is wise to grant that what you're asking the other guy to do may be quite uncomfortable to him/her. A group must grasp that if its non-immigrant members somewhere else are causing people a lot of grief (hijacking planes and cruise ships, blowing up embassies, etc.) it is going to have a harder row to hoe for awhile, and it would be prudent (another citizenly virtue) to a) speak out against such things without making excuses for them and b) otherwise avoid doing those things likely to cause offence.

When an Islamic group decided to build a memorial center at/near the site of the 9/11 attack, they should have been able to predict that this would upset a lot of people. Not only were the
attackers Islamic--and not only did the Islamic world in general show indecent glee about the attack, but this was only the last of many attacks on citizens and installations of this country which Islamic groups proudly claimed credit for. That some Muslims died in the attacks is immaterial--does not wipe out the long, long chain of Islamic hostility. It would have been one thing to have the Muslim victims' names placed with the others, and identified there as Muslims--but to use that site to proselytize for the religion that lies behind so many attacks on the innocent (I cannot forget the Jewish man in a wheelchair pushed over the side of the ship to drown, or Maj. Nadal's attack on soldiers at Fort Hood) was bound to raise a stink. It is hard to believe that those making the application did not know that--did not anticipate it--and were not, in a way, probing to see if they could start a controversy. If they did not know, then they did not know enough about the culture into which they had moved. Though I am not angry about it, and have not spoken out in opposition, I do think it was a rude and tactless thing to propose (and, if carried out, to do.)

I know--I do not dispute--that many Muslims had nothing to do with the attacks, did not approve of them, would have stopped them if they could. I do not dispute that there are moderate, even liberal, Muslims, that many Muslims have all the virtues of civilized persons and are admirable in all those ways. I am totally, 100%, appalled at those who want to burn the Koran (which, by the way, I have read in English translation, with the same attention I've given to other holy books) or throw paint on mosques or beat up Muslims. But Muslims fail to recognize how much forbearance they've had. Schools in my area held consciousness-raising sessions for kids about not teaseing children in Muslim-defined clothing...but not about not teasing Jewish children or racial minorities. More law enforcement was dedicated to protecting mosques than synagogues--and synagogues are still targeted for vandalism. What I heard, in my area, after 9/11, was not condemnation by local mosques of the attack--but an immediate cry for protection even before anything happened. Our church, and many others (not, obviously all) already had in place a "peace and reconciliation" program that urged us to understand, forgive, pray for, not just innocent Muslims but the attackers themselves. It sponsored a talk by a Muslim from a local mosque--but the talk was all about how wonderful Islam was--totally ignoring the historical roots of Islamic violence.

I can easily imagine how Muslims would react to my excusing the Crusades on the basis of Islamic aggression from 600 to 1000 C.E....(for instance, excusing the building of a church on the site of a mosque in Cordoba after the Reconquista by reminding them of the mosque built on the site of an important early Christian church in Antioch.) So I don't give that lecture to the innocent Muslims I come in contact with. I would appreciate the same courtesy in return (and don't get it.) The same with other points of Islam that I find appalling (especially as a free woman) and totally against those basic principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution...I feel that I personally (and many others) lean over backwards to put up with these things, to let Muslims believe stuff that unfits them for citizenship, on the grounds of their personal freedom. It would be helpful to have them understand what they're demanding of me and others--how much more they're asking than giving. It would be helpful for them to show more understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship in a non-Muslim country. (And the same is true for many others, of course. Libertarians, survivalists, Tea-Partyers, fundamentalist Christians, anyone else whose goals benefit only their own group. There's been a huge decline in the understanding of good citizenship overall.)

But I don't expect this to happen. And on this anniversary of 9/11, all I can do is hope that no bombs are thrown, no Korans burned, no innocents killed... by anyone.
Thanks. You make many good points.

That stuff you mentioned in the first several paragraphs, about how the business of a citizen is the welfare of the nation, is what I (and others) call *civic morality*. It's a hallmark of a good society, and for all the faults America has, she's currently the country with the highest level of civic morality in the world. This in spite of the all too vocal selfish people you saw and heard. This is especially remarkable because civic morality isn't taught in American schools, or even widely understood as a phrase outside formal schools of philosophy. But somehow it's an idea that has permeated American culture, and resulted in a population that seems to be quietly dedicated to maintaining the welfare of the nation.

When I was a kid, civic morality was taught as such (called "citizenship") and discussed by the adults back from WWII. There were significant gaps. No one where I grew up discussed the morality of segregation until I was about high school age and then it was "will desegregation lead to violence?" (Yes, but get it over with...) It was a feature in Scout troops, church youth groups, other youth activities as well as in school.

The identification of the US as "peace-loving" didn't quite square with the number of wars (not more wars than anyone else, actually, but more than could be easily explained by "peace-loving" and the influence of large corporations, even then, in international affairs was generally glossed over in the schools, but at least--in the town where I grew up--the duty of citizens to be informed, to vote, to respect those who voted another way, to volunteer in some way, to be engaged in the community, to uphold the rights of (at least most of) the citizens to worship, live, etc. as they wished within the law, was understood, demonstrated by most adults, and thus modeled for us youngsters.
I had some unique perspectives. My mother worked in a hardware store, 12 hours a day, on Main Street; I was often in the store helping out (marking merchandise, straightening displays, etc.) and like the other "store kids" downtown was in and out of all the stores, running errands to the bank and post office, etc. So my background in small town retail was strong...and I got a feel for how commerce should (and sometimes does) work--how the steel mills in Pennsylvania connected with a farmer in south Texas, how our cotton became cloth that became clothes that were shipped back to our stores--and the cattle from ranches north of us provided not only meat but the leather that made shoes and belts and briefcases as well as saddles and bridles and chaps.

Then she went to work for a small oil & gas company as a draftsman. The pay initially was even less than she'd made at the hardware store, but the hours were better. I spent a lot of time out there when she worked overtime, and was allowed to use the law library (after all, how much can a 12 year old girl get into a law library?) She was also involved in the women's organization in the petroleum industry (pretty much required to be in Desk & Derrick) and in some early landmark litigation and legislative efforts, because of her ability to draw really good cartoons and prepare exhibits. Again, no one worried about the polite, quiet girl in glasses who rode along on business trips (there being no alternatives for me) and who had good ears and a sharp brain. Those didn't show. I learned far more than they thought about the inside of the oil bidness in Texas--initially fascinating, later appalling.

It became obvious that at the top--in the Dallas skyscrapers where the view out the plate-glass windows of the reception rooms gave a view that went on forever, for instance--the concept of good citizenship was very different from that of the cobbler, the farmer, the plumber, the carpenter, the hardware store owner, the dress shop manager, etc. that I had started with. The "If it's good for [General Motors/X oil company/ Y defense contractor] it's good for everyone" mentality was gearing up to even higher speed. Good citizens were those who made a lot of money and had their name on a building somewhere. Guys in the trenches...not so much.
Regarding citizenship and its origins with our Founding Fathers, I am reminded of Benjamin Franklin's reply to John Hancock's call that the Declaration of Independence should be unanimous, "We must indeed all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." They understood what they were signing.

Dr. Phil
(Reply) (Thread)

From: nagasvoice
2010-09-11 08:19 pm (UTC)

It is still altogether too true, also. I believe we're going to need all the resources that a multicultural community can provide. I suspect the political and scientific and technical challenges we have ahead of us dwarf anything we've dealt with so far. If you look at the details of the San Bruno fire, for instance, you can see in miniature what the challenge of a major earthquake along the Hayward Fault, in Ventura County, or anywhere in the LA Basin, would look like. Only more of those, in many more places. And that's just a small regional problem, not even talking national issues.
(Reply) (Parent) (Thread) (Expand)
(no subject) - e_moon60 Expand
(no subject) - nagasvoice Expand

From: amy34
2010-09-11 08:56 pm (UTC)

Wow, great post.
(Reply) (Thread)

From: brendanpodger
2010-09-11 09:13 pm (UTC)

Are you talking about the planned Moslem community centre to be built near The Twin Towers site that seems to have so many people upset? I understood that it was replacing another building that was damaged in the 9-11 disaster. Of course why it needs to be 14 stories high is another question, but since the cost of the site alone is reported to be 18mil I suppose the builders want to get as much value for money floor space as they can.
(Reply) (Thread)

From: litch
2010-09-12 12:03 am (UTC)

When an Islamic group decided to build a memorial center at/near the site of the 9/11 attack, they should have been able to predict that this would upset a lot of people.

*sigh*

How close are they allowed to build? If 5 blocks is too close, what about the mosque that already exists 4 blocks away?

If this was such a natural forseeable reaction how come it didn't happen for months, over a year if I recall correctly, until some demogogues found some traction in the national media?

I heard muslims in the central texas region denouncing the terrorist on that day. I'm curious, did your church denounce the jackass that shot the doctor in kansas?
Basically, we speak out against all violence, and pray for all victims, every Sunday.

As an individual, I am probably more angered by attacks on individuals by "our" religious bigots than by anyone else's.

Well said, Elizabeth!

I love this post, though the part litch quotes was one I also found troublesome -- the furor over this building after all, was completely fanned by the right-wing media, and ignores the mosque already closer to the spot. It also exploit mainstream American ignorance and paranoia over Islam, which people living in NY, closer to the proposed community center, may or may not even share.

That said, having been a foreign college student and a PR in the US, I agree with everything you've said about immigrants/visitors in their adopted country. I don't begrudge strangers in a strange land if they want to hang out with their own peeps from time to time, but if it was 100% of the time so as to avoid integrating into the larger society, there's something wrong there.

The furor over this building is unfortunate; my point is that it was predictable once the right people got hold of it, which it was inevitable that they would.

We could, you know, give those who started hollering a plus point for NOT going after the pre-existing mosque. But that would require careful splitting of hairs.

One of the differences, when I was a kid, between immigrants from overseas (European Jews, Lebanese, Greeks, Russians) and those from Mexico was that the overseas immigrants had had to break their ties to the old country. Anyone who arrived by ship knew they could go back only if they made sufficient success to pay the fare "home" (if there even was a home.) Several of my ancestors got here fleeing war or persecution, in
different waves, from different sources. (I have a strong suspicion that at least some were debt criminals offloaded in the South, indentured servants for a time.) There was no way back. As far as I know, none of them returned to Europe even to visit. (My cousins and I may well be the first, on that side of the family, to visit abroad for hundreds of years. It wasn't a rich family.) Many Mexicans, on the other hand, and later, Central Americans, retained a strong connection to their former homes, visiting back and forth with relatives there. Thus it was possible for them to stay connected in a way that overseas immigrants rarely did, and difficult to commit fully to their new home. We all do what's easy, if we don't think about it...we stay with the familiar. But if a diverse community is to be a community, and not a geographically bounded group of competing cliques, we all have to think about it.

I left the Libertarian party for the points you mention, and I'm now an Independent. I think anything taken to an extreme is bad. I support the smoking ban that recently passed in San Antonio as an example because second hand smoke can cause cancer and can also trigger asthma attacks not to mention that smoke smell is vile. I note that de-regulation of business didn't go well and put us well into the recession we currently are in, so while I prefer small government, it needs to be within reason. Corporations cut corners and at the risk of their employees safety, so someone has to guard dog them. I do believe in personal freedoms provided they don't infringe on other people's personal freedom. In other words, common sense should apply. I think the current situation over the mosque in New York would be alleviated if the individuals in question applied common sense.

Thanks for an insightful essay. I like reading well-thought out ideas especially ones that make me think.

In other words, common sense should apply. I think the current situation over the mosque in New York would be alleviated if the individuals in question applied common sense.

Yes. For instance, if the individuals creating a controversy over this issue on right-wing talk radio had enough "common sense" to do some basic research, they would learn that:

1) The site of the Park 51 center was already being used as prayer space for Feisal Rauf's mosque in Tribeca for months before the community center was planned, with no protest.

2) The community center had been in the works for months, gaining positive news coverage from both left- and right-wing sources, with no protest.

3) The community center is being built by Muslims but is not a "mosque". It is a YMCA-like facility with exercise, recreational and social spaces that CONTAINS an interfaith center and chapel, intended to be used by multiple
religions and denominations.

4) Said interfaith chapel serves a similar purpose to the prayer room that existed in the World Trade Center prior to its destruction and that still exists in the Pentagon, both targets of the 9/11 attacks, and both used for Muslim prayer and worship services on a daily basis. To claim that the very existence of a Muslim worship site is therefore a "desecration" of the bombing sites must be observed to be at least slightly ironic.

5) The previous use of this site was as a Burlington Coat Factory. It is just as close to the WTC as a number of other businesses, including fast food joints, strip clubs, convenience stores and office parks. A large office building completely obstructs the line of sight between Park 51 and the WTC site.

6) The whole controversy started with a blogger who is, to put it mildly, an Islamophobe and whose spin on the issue -- calling the community center in question a "mosque", claiming that the center is "within view of Ground Zero", etc. -- has dominated media coverage since then despite being incredibly misleading, and this has percolated down into the way the question is posed to people in polls ("Do you think it's right to build a mosque at Ground Zero?"), meaning that the "Most of America opposes it" statistic is based on falsehoods.

All too often in our world "common sense" has become a synonym for "received wisdom" or, even worse, "my kneejerk prejudice". Let's not use it that way here.

---or does anything that reflects badly on the service--that's damage done to public trust and/or to the reputation of the nation. When a policeman or jail guard rapes a prisoner...when a judge rules in favor of a corporation in which he owns stock...when a company fires the employees in its own nation and hires cheaper labor elsewhere...that's damage done to the fabric of the nation. And that's being a bad citizen.

And when a politician implements regulations which favor their own personal interest, either by hamstringing his business competition OR by implementing a new scheme of regulations which he can take advantage of.

For example how fortuitous is it that Carbon Offsets are paid to A company which Al Gore is Chairman for?

Had the signers of the Declaration been as wedded to personal liberty as the right wing today, there would have been no successful Revolution.
Self sacrifice is not the same thing as one person sitting back on their laurels and nominating another for their own sacrifice. If the Liberals of today had been so wedded to their version of 'collective' personal freedoms, Thomas Paine could not have written Common Sense.

When a President's wife (Laura Bush) publicly announces that she and her husband have suffered more from the war than anyone else—a statement I'm sure most brain-injured and amputee vets and their families would take issue with—and then retire to a cushy Dallas home and a cushy central Texas ranch—with a big estate in Patagonia waiting should they wish—we have an excellent example of citizenship failure right at the top. With greater power and wealth should come greater responsibility and accountability.

It has been a while since I read the Heris Serrano series, but I seem to recall that the protagonist was at times unhappy with casualties suffered under her watch. I find it a touch interesting that you could gloss over the fact that Laura Bush could be alluding to her husband having substantial issues with the guilt of soldiers dying under his command. He was at the top and he's never denied that. We cannot know what he goes through but don't denigrate his wife's spoken concern over what she's seeing first person as a failure of citizenship. Even now, as a former president he still takes time to visit with troops. That certainly shows a different sort of attention to what is important. Did Clinton ever visit with troops rotating into or out of the Balkans during President Bush's term? Did anyone know that troops were still rotating into KFOR?

And the same is true for many others, of course. Libertarians, survivalists, Tea-Partyers, fundamentalist Christians, anyone else whose goals benefit only their own group. There's been a huge decline in the understanding of good citizenship overall.

Careful with that brush, you're spattering paint everywhere.

The country does not exist for it's own greater purposes. We're not in Fascist Italy where the people existed for the state. It exists as a fabric for the betterment of every citizen through their own resources. For someone to extol their own self interests as part of the greater fabric, say in the scope of taxes is hardly an example of a failure of citizenship. The whole casus belli of the American Revolution was taxes. Excessive taxes levied by an unconcerned government. This is precisely what the TEA party is speaking of today. Precisely how is excessive taxes and excessive spending all over the front of the federal and state governments NOT something that individuals and groups should be concerned with?

This morning, listening to NPR as I prepared for work, I listened to an audio clip of a congressman excoriating a colleague because he wanted to lower taxes for a particular subset of the taxpaying population. Naturally he considered a lowering of taxes to be an EXPENDITURE of the federal government, that it would have to borrow money to lower taxes. Citizens do not exist to fund Congressional self aggrandizement and pet projects. What taxes they collect is what they collect. Not collecting a tax is NOT an expenditure. THAT is a failure of basic citizenship.

(Reply) (Thread) (Expand)

Of course I'm spattering paint everywhere. It's a target-rich environment.

Spare me the crocodile tears for the Bushes. Heris Serrano admitted her mistakes; that gave her sorrow over those who suffered from her decisions some legitimacy. Bush never has. Cheney never has. The whole damned bunch of them never has. They are smug in their certainty that whatever went wrong wasn't their fault, and I still challenge Laura Bush to endure what the mothers and wives and fathers and husbands of critically injured soldiers have endured. They could walk away. Families can't. Friends can't.

If you will take a look at the whole of the Declaration of Independence, you will discover (perhaps to your surprise) that more than "excessive taxes" was behind the American Revolution. Yes, the tax on tea caused tea
to be thrown in Boston Harbor. But many other economic, political, and military issues were involved, which those at the time felt just as strongly about. The English legal system had far more wrong with it (from the colonists' point of view) than taxes...and other economic oppression (such as restricting trade to English ships) were even more galling. You're entitled to whatever political opinions you hold, but don't start ignoring large chunks of relevant history.

When I rail against some government restrictions now, it's on those things--not taxes--that I concentrate. Where we have slipped back towards a form of attainder...where the Bush Administration favored invasion of citizens' rights of privacy, favored secret arrests and trials, and cruel and unusual punishments...there's where I see government being overbearing. Do I see tax money being misspent? Sure, on things that do not benefit the country and the people in it. (Let's see...two wars we didn't have to get into, highly expensive...bailing out the big banks right at the end of Bush's term...) Do I think taxes are oppressive? No. And unless you're self-employed, I'm paying more federal taxes than you are, because the self-employed pay the employer's contribution to Social Security. I think the tax code should manipulate taxes to benefit the nation: specifically, giving tax cuts to corporations "to create jobs" without any guarantee that they *would* maintain or increase jobs was...stupid. Of course they took the money and ran for the border. Make tax cuts for corporations contingent on their behavior, as their behavior benefits us as a whole.

(Reply) (Parent) (Thread) (Expand)
(no subject) - montieth Expand

part 2 - montieth Expand

and part 3 (sorry its looking like a R. Jordan series) - montieth Expand

(no subject) - montieth Expand

(no subject) - februaryfour Expand

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From: swordygardener 2010-09-13 03:50 pm (UTC)

does not wipe out the long, long chain of Islamic hostility

You may want to do some research to check where this hostility comes from. It is intellectually dishonest to paint US-Americans as innocent, attacked by evil Islamic hostility. THE WEST FANNED THESE FLAMES FOR YEARS. Islamists did not randomly decide to hate the west for no reason.

It is unsurprising that racist hostility against Islam erupts against this Mosque, once the demagogues heard of it. That is not a reason to not build it. On the contrary: This is a reason to build it. The view that Christianity is Good And Whole and the rest is evil satanic is precisely what got us into that mess. The attitudes responsible for it should not be coddled.

No, we indeed need this center. It should even be closer to the place of 9/11, which would be better for everyone involved. What muslim would not see the tragedy with their own eyes when visiting - a tragedy that hit everyone equally, muslim, jew, christian, atheist? What racist christian would not be reminded, upon seeing the centre, that his unfounded, racist ideas may not be true at all?

Indeed, your argument falls apart here: Just because racists throw a fit does not mean something should not happen. The same people throw a fit whenever gay people, say, want to marry. Surely you're not arguing that, just because a majority wants to discriminate, it's suddenly okay?

Because that doesn't work that way, unless you kick the Constitution into the dirt and set it on fire.

The same with other points of Islam that I find appalling (especially as a free woman) and totally against those
basic principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution...

Absolutely correct. Of course, I find an equal number of points of Christianity appalling (especially as a free woman) and totally against those basic principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution...

If you can look past that for christianity, and accept that some tenets of a faith can be outdated, why do you need to treat Islam in a completely different way?

Your piece on immigrants is really good. But you do commit the very falacity you point out the italian immigrant of doing.

Don’t. Learn from your own observation. Don’t sacrifice the constituion just to appease a vocal minority of openly racist people, fueled by demagogic media.

From: kleenestar
2010-09-14 11:20 pm (UTC)
This. Thanks.

(Reply) (Parent) (Thread)
(no subject) - e_moon60 Expand
(no subject) - arctangent Expand
(no subject) - arctangent Expand

Ha! Ha! I am amused by your satire on the thoughts of terrible people!

Wait, wait, wait. Wait.

Wait.

You're talking about the cultural center spearheaded by this guy? The guy who's spent a huge chunk of his adult life promoting America-Islamic world friendship? How moderate does he have to be before he's not a terroristically offensive specter anymore? (Baptist?) As someone else already said, how far away does the cultural center have to be before it’s not offensive to (a tiny minority of) 9/11 victims' families anymore? Farther than the actual mosque that's already there? Farther than the McDonalds? The strip club? The ocean?

The plans for this center were on the front page of the New York Times in 2009. Why is it only an issue now? Could it be because some demagogues needed a way to keep the angry flames fanned going into an election?

People assimilated in the past because it was the only way to, y'know, be treated like a human being. Back when we had Colored Entrances and every college had a Jew quota, you damn well sucked up every piece of the prevailing culture you could in order to get a job. (If you were dark-skinned enough you were still SOL, but oh well!) Or, hey, there was always the threat of the government taking your kids away and doing it for you.

Now we have laws against that kind of thing, because it was discriminatory and cruel. Bilingual education exists so you don't have fifteen-year-olds in second grade. And, thank goodness, nobody's pooped on the First Amendment enough yet to convince voting America to throw it away.

I find this post deeply offensive. Does that mean you have to remove it? Seriously, am I missing something here? Does Rauf drink kitten blood for breakfast and the memo only went out to xenophobes?

Please take your puffed-up offense on behalf of a few bigots and liars from my sight. I’m offended on behalf of
decent human beings, and there are a lot more of us than there are of you.

From: goatsfoot
2010-09-15 02:35 am (UTC)

Re: Ha! Ha! Ha! I am amused by your satire on the thoughts of terrible people!

+1000 I find this post deeply offensive too, and bristling with outdated assumptions.

From: alexpshenichkin
2010-09-14 11:38 pm (UTC)

So, if Fox News and Newt Gingrich tell a bunch of my neighbors some vicious lies about me, that counts as *me* making my neighbors upset, rather than Fox News and Newt Gingrich making my neighbors upset?
Freedom of religion should include the freedom to build a community center near a strip joint.

Seriously, blaming Islam for Al Qaeda is like blaming Christianity for the Ku Klux Klan or Judaism for the Stern Gang. If the site of the World Trade Center is now "sacred ground," it’s sacred to every religion, because people of every religion died there. That’s especially true for Islam: there was a mosque on the 17th floor of the WTC.

This is the nation created by Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. Have we stopped fighting for the freedom for everyone to worship as they choose?

Once again, read what I wrote, not what you think I wrote.

Nothing I wrote suggested that people should not worship as they choose (so long as their arm doesn’t reach someone else's nose.)

Many immigrants travel to other countries not because they want to shed their culture and become part of the great and beautiful American Pageant or whatever but because they *have to*, because things suck in the country they live in and they want to be able to earn a decent living, support their families and enjoy life. This is a universal human desire, and the decent thing to do is to support everyone at least having the opportunity to do this, if not the guarantee of achieving it. If an immigrant works hard at his job, earns a decent living, pays his taxes and obeys the law, I fail to see what moral right you have to demand anything from him beyond that.

The nature of a "free" country, after all -- as the USA so often prides itself on being -- is that you are not beholden
to any specific definition of "American culture" (as though there were any authoritative version of such) in order to be "an American", and that you are as free to contribute to this country simply by living and working in it -- and being part of the nebulous, changing definition of "American culture" -- as anyone else.

If immigrant communities are xenophobic and insular, it is often because they have been given little choice in the matter by those around them, and it strikes me as rank arrogance and presumption of the worst kind to say that someone who works hard, pays his taxes, obeys the law, etc. *still* must go yet further to earn the right to be treated with basic common decency. They must give up their favorite foods, alter their manner of dress, not only learn a new language but learn it with fluency and shed their distressing accents, etc., etc. -- perhaps even give up their most cherished religious rituals or personal beliefs.

I mean, seriously. I always thought "being a good citizen" meant doing your best to be a good person to those around you by your own standards. Part of that means *leaving people the hell alone who want to be left alone* as long as they don't break any rules, pay their taxes, show up to work on time, etc. At least in a free and democratic country, where we are confident enough in the idea of freedom that we believe people can all pursue their own differing visions of the common good and still muddle through in the end, it is.

Civic-mindedness is a good thing, yes. Taken to its extreme, claiming that people should not only think of the common good in general and in their own way but must do so in a *specific* way that you prescibe according to your specific ideal of the common good, one that excludes all other possible definitions (such that we must all be loyal to *America* as a whole, and not our own families or our own towns or our own religions lest we betray our overriding commitment to *America*) is the root of fascism. It is an ugly and by definition anti-freedom standard to which to hold people, and making someone's religion -- one of the elements of self-identification that is, for cripes' sake, *by definition* sacred -- an issue for whether they have been properly "assimilated" is one great huge lurching step along that slippery slope.

If civic-mindedness means respecting and caring about other people as a whole, that starts with respecting and caring about other people's rights to live the lives they choose without being fucked with by meddling outsiders. When you look out after other people's welfare that's a big part of what their welfare *is*. If you aren't protecting people's happiness by protecting people's right to be left alone, then what American people are you protecting? As opposed to some nebulous idealized reification of "America"?

--arctangent

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How is the Park 51 center *not*, in fact, an attempt at the kind of civic-minded engagement you're talking about? It's an attempt to create a *community center* for the entire neighborhood, as an act of service by the Muslim community for its neighbors, of whatever faith. It is an act of *service* by Muslims for non-Muslims, in pretty much the exact same way that the YMCA was an outreach by certain Christians to the wider community (indeed, Park 51 seems to be modeled directly on the early YMCA in its principles).

As elizaeffect said, how much further do the Park 51 builders have to go to be *really* "citizens" here? They already stand against the terrorist acts you decry. They already stand up for moderate, liberal values including standing up for gender equality and better treatment for women. They are already working hard to integrate their community into the wider community by spending their own money to make something nice for their neighborhood.

Do they have to go beyond even this, and exist in a state of constant apology for the actions of people thousands of miles away who claim to be of the same religion? Do they have to be so cowed by humiliation and shame over 9/11 -- an action they never endorsed, participated in or had *any relationship to* other than being in the same highly diverse religious tradition, the second-largest religious tradition in the world with over a billion members, as the tiny group of fanatics who carried it out -- that they must kowtow to any demand, no matter how costly and difficult, based on reasoning however specious, prejudiced and irrational, by a small group of aggrieved survivors?
Or maybe that won't even be enough, and they will only appease people like you completely when they cease to be Muslim altogether.

This is why the ugliness of setting a bar for "assimilated enough" is the root of so many sins, and why, for all the things you can accuse "multiculturalism" as a movement of, taking that bar and splintering it to pieces is one of the most important things it has done. Because people can always keep raising it higher, because there will always be *something* about you -- your name, the color of your skin, your facial features, the spices you put in your food -- that a bigot somewhere will regard as disturbing and alien and demand be stripped away from your identity. Because the people who think of you as Too Different will never really be satisfied, even when they've gone down the list of everything about you -- from things as trivial as how you pronounce the letter "r" to things as deeply personal as what you think about God -- that they can possibly demand you change.

This shows in the reified -- which is just the fancy way of saying bigoted -- way you speak of "Islam" as a monolithic group, the way you dredge up things from *centuries ago* as a reason to be afraid of "Islam" as that same monolithic group now, as though the expansion of the Umayyad Caliphate has fuck-all to do with 9/11, and as though one has fuck-all to do with the Park 51 project. You might as well hate and distrust me for the massive territorial conquests committed by my ancestors during the Tang Dynasty as well as my people stealing your nuclear secrets during the Cold War. (And you probably would, if you personally had experienced those events the same way, through the same filters, as you have experienced "Islam".) The very fact that you think arguing about the Crusades is a productive thing to do -- that Christianity and Islam are somehow two huge warring teams, one of which Started It and is the aggressor and the other of which is the aggrieved victim, and this status coheres for all of the recorded history of both religions -- is a rather deranged way of viewing modern-day relationships between individual groups of Muslims and individual groups of Christians.

You made some great points about civic responsibility.

And then you dropped the ball in the middle.

Wow. Embedded in a soapboxing that I applaud, other things that I receive as a punch in the gut.

Just how assimilated does one have to be before one has done *enough*?

What is it that *some* Muslims believe that makes them all unfit?

You said:

*The point here is that in order to accept large numbers of immigrants, and maintain any social cohesion, acceptance by the receiving population is not the only requirement: immigrants must be willing and able to change, to merge with the receiving population. The new place isn't the old place; the new customs aren't the old customs. "Acceptance" is a multi-directional communications grid. Groups that self-isolate, that determinedly...*
distinguish themselves by location, by language, by dress, will not be accepted as readily as those that plunge into the mainstream. This is not just an American problem--this is human nature, the tribalism that underlies all societies and must be constantly curtailed if larger groups are to co-exist. It is natural to want to be around those who talk like you, eat the familiar foods, wear the familiar clothes, have the familiar cultural references. But in a multicultural society like ours--and it has been multi-cultural from its inception--citizens need to go beyond nature. That includes those who by their history find it least comfortable. (emphasis mine)

How do we achieve both multi-culturalism, and this "merge with the general population"?

I am a member of an ethnic group that has been called "a model minority", and yet...because we're not white, we're still treated as interlopers. How much is enough? Japanese Americans don't live in enclaves - most of us are spread out through the suburbs. Little Tokyo in Los Angeles is a dying community. My mother made sure my weekday lunches were devoid of Japanese-ness. Utterly. I didn't even get Japanese-label chocolates in them. (I cried the first time, as an adult, that my non-Japanese peers were squeeing over their cute bento boxes. - What you wrote, Ms. Moon - THAT is why I didn't get bento boxes to take school.)

My father hid the bonsai in the back yard. And even that didn't appear until I was ten. We drove GM cars until I was 13.

Was the error in speaking Japanese when we were shopping, rather than having my mother stumble in her best-as-she-could-manage-then English? Was it in my going to Japanese school on Saturdays, in a desperate attempt by my parents to keep me literate in a difficult language? Especially because I *did* get bento boxes there? Should I have gotten the eyelid surgery, tried to Michael Jackson my complexion? (I tried getting a perm, and I got orthodonture for my stereotypical buck teeth.) Was it my mother's subscription to a Japanese language newspaper?

You can ask Bill Gawne up there whether I sound like a native-born American (which I am) when I speak English. Tell, me, what else was I supposed to do so that I didn't offend? There's a discussion over at Making Light about the alleged cycle of hazing and acceptance. I believe it's a lie that only serves white-assimilable groups.

Please tell me where the goalposts are, so I can attempt to set my aim correctly.

Meanwhile, I like all the Koreatowns and Chinatowns and Little Ethiopias and all the halal markets. Just like I like the Italian enclaves, and the German delis, and the Irish pubs. I don't want other immigrant groups to try the futile, heartbreaking assimilation that me and mine went through.

I don't know who you are offline to your friends and family. I hope what you wrote wasn't what you intended to get across. But right now...right now I don't see how to read what you wrote so that it wasn't something hurtful to me, and other visibly non-white, non-black Americans.

(Reply) (Thread) (Expand)

As another member of that favored "model minority", Asian-Americans, I have to echo this, and point out that all this successful happy "model minority" bullshit hides a great deal of neurosis, dysfunction and pain that comes directly from an assimilate-at-all-costs perspective.

I'll also point out, since you mentioned "non-white, non-black", that African-Americans are themselves descended from -- unwilling -- immigrants to our shores, and that they themselves brought in a "different" culture that for a long time remained "unassimilated" to what was thought of as "normal" white culture, and that even today black people are frequently accused of all the un-civic shit that e_moon60 brings up in this post -- dressing different, acting different, hanging out with only their own, failing to be properly contrite when one of their own does something that white America finds offensive, etc.
Hell, they've even had their own "English-as-a-second-language" controversy with the whole Ebonics "scandal".

The bitch of it is for them that they don't have an actual country to go back to even if they wanted to, and that white people can't smarmily tell them to try to assimilate harder without confronting the awkward fact that it's white people's fault they were brought here in the first place, and this complicates the matter. (As does the fact that black people have been here long enough that modern white culture has been just as influenced by the black community as vice versa, cf. basically all American forms of music.)

Doesn't mean this kind of shit still doesn't come up, with vaguely racist broadsides being launched every now and again about why won't black kids speak "proper English" and whatnot.

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I was thinking about this: "I cannot forget the Jewish man in a wheelchair pushed over the side of the ship to drown, or Maj. Nadal's attack on soldiers at Fort Hood."

Can you forget about the Jewish massacre of muslims at Deir Yassin? That wasn't the only massacre by the Stern Gang, but it's the most famous. What about the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila Refugee Camps? The fact is there's no religion without blood on its hands. That does not mean anyone should be prevented from worshipping anywhere.

---

I don't forget about any of it, actually. All the way back to the Jews of Medina, massacred by Mohammed.

You are right that there is no culture, no religion, no nationality, that has not done terrible things--has not been the bad guy. Every culture wants to paint its history in its own colors. And every culture--including mine--lies about some of it.

But where did you get the idea that I'm opposed to "anyone worshipping anywhere?" I didn't say that. From my perspective, no one can stop anyone from worshipping anywhere...on the subway, in an airplane, walking down a forest path, whatever. The question of where to site a community center or a house of worship is a different one. In this instance, I thought it was unwise because (and only because) it was likely to raise a stink. I thought the stink was predictable and would merely give ammunition to people I despise. Which it did.
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - montieth Expand

A TRANSLATION OF WHAT HE REALLY MEANS - onceupon Expand

Re: A TRANSLATION OF WHAT HE REALLY MEANS - montieth Expand

Re: A TRANSLATION OF WHAT HE REALLY MEANS - februaryfour Expand

... - montieth Expand
... - februaryfour Expand
... - montieth Expand
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... - montieth Expand
... - februaryfour Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - rfmcdepei Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - epilady Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - montieth Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - rfmcdepei Expand

... - montieth Expand
... - rfmcdepei Expand
... - montieth Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - hepkitten Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - maradydd Expand

... - montieth Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - arctangent Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - montieth Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - exiledv2 Expand

... - montieth Expand
... - exiledv2 Expand
... - arctangent Expand
... - emily_goddess Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - arctangent Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - epilady Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - montieth Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - mumbly_joe Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - montieth Expand

Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - zia_narratora Expand

... - trinker Expand
... - mumbly_joe Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - epilady Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - montieth Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - epilady Expand
... - montieth Expand
... - nojojojo Expand
... - montieth Expand
... - aliaras Expand
... - montieth Expand
... - exiledv2 Expand
... - montieth Expand
... - pantryslut Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - trinker Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - montieth Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - trinker Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - claws_n_stripes Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - fightingwords Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - montieth Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - fightingwords Expand
... - montieth Expand
... - joannkatana Expand
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... - popelizbet Expand
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... - montieth Expand
Re: Seen a lot of women stoned to death by christians have you? - pgdudda Expand
We have always had trouble with immigrants (the native peoples had the most troubles with immigrants!) Every new group that landed on the shore was greeted with distrust (and often responded badly) until it showed that it was willing and able to contribute something those already here wanted.

The parenthetical in the first sentence of that paragraph gives the lie to the final clause of the second.

And it's probably the only case that does...alas. After that, those already here outnumbered those who arrived.

And it may be only partially true. Some native American groups wanted what the immigrants brought--just not the whole package. The weapons, the alcohol...not the conquest. Never that.

Elizabeth,

You have a number of good points to make about citizenship, though I suggest that the next time you enjoy a frankfurter, hamburger, pizza, taco, or gyro, that you reflect on the fact that the process of immigration and entry into American culture is not the one-way assimilation you describe. That list, after all, could be much longer and not confined to popular food options.

That said, I must respectfully bring to your attention that in this post you yourself are failing as a citizen.

You fail as a citizen when you describe, as you do, the bigotry with which Americans receive immigrants with the
subtext that that's just how it is, or even that such bigotry has justification, rather than condemning it unequivocally as one of our great failings as a nation.

You fail as a citizen when you treat bigotry against Muslims, as you do, as having a reasonable basis to which Muslims should show a deference that you do not expect Christians, Jews, Atheists, or any other group to show.

You fail as a citizen when you treat, as you do, the entirely manufactured outrage as something with any rational basis whatsoever. A Muslim community that has lived in that neighborhood for years, that was a part of the economy created by the World Trade Center, that itself lived through and were victims and survivors of the 9/11 attacks, is building a community center because they need a community center. They are building it where they are because that's where their community is and that's where they could find a building they could afford. Out of the kindness of their hearts, instead of building a mosque -- because the reason this all started is that their current mosques are so overcrowded people have to kneel in the street on cardboard boxes to pray -- they're building a community center that will serve the needs of people of all faiths.

Republicans created outrage out of nothing because they really don't want to head into November talking about the economy and how it got here. And you're carrying water for them by saying it's a reasonable reaction. It's not, and you fail as a citizen for being hoodwinked, for not calling bullshit.

But me no buts about how close it is to the World Trade Center site: if it was another 2 blocks or 20 miles away Republicans would have manufactured the same outrage. You should know this because if you bother to look, you will see them manufacturing this outrage all over the country, anywhere Muslims are trying to build Mosques.

I challenge you to stop failing as a citizen: Unequivocally endorse Park51 not only as something a patriotic Muslim American community has a right to do, but as being exactly the sort of thing a patriotic Muslim American community would and should be doing. Unequivocally condemn those who manufacture irrational outrage. Address that outrage in those who have been hoodwinked, or even in those few who sincerely can't yet think of any Muslim thing with the same compassion and firmness that you would a drunk friend asking you for their car keys. Become an active part of the growing dialog between actual Muslim and non-Muslim Americans, get past the big monolithic shadow Islamic stereotype you write about and pay lip service to denying.

(Reply) (Thread) (Expand)

From: lovecraftienne
2010-09-15 08:25 pm (UTC)

Bravo, sir, well-said. Saved me many keystrokes, and not a little blood-pressure rise.

(Reply) (Parent) (Thread)
(no subject) - the_xtina Expand
(no subject) - tacky_tramp Expand
(no subject) - naomikritzer Expand
(no subject) - zia_narratora Expand
(no subject) - chomiji Expand
(no subject) - faithhopetricks Expand
(no subject) - pandarus Expand
(no subject) - vixyish Expand
(no subject) - foxipher Expand
(no subject) - holzman Expand
(no subject) - foxipher Expand
(no subject) - spudtater Expand
(no subject) - sioneva Expand
Bullshit. "Some immigrants responded badly." Well, aside from that, Mrs. Lincoln, did you like the play?

Based as it is on an incorrect premise—that Cordoba House is an Islamic memorial—this post fails and fails hard. I'm very disappointed.

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out --
Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out --
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out --
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me -- and there was no one left to speak for me.

Ms. Moon, I hope the arguments you make are never turned against you for your gender, your race, your religion, your sexual orientation, or any other group you are a part of. It strikes me as a remarkable failure of empathy for you not to consider the larger implications of your approach. "But no!" you may argue, "Muslims are different!" They're only different in that they're being targeted for outrage. Any group is vulnerable to the same argument, because every group has recalcitrant, rude, or just plain evil members.

Try reading the end of your essay again, but substituting "Jew" for "Muslim." Does that disturb you at all? It concerns me.

Bingo.

Y'know what? The moment every Southerner gets rid of the Dixie flag and removes every laudatory reference to an army which fought to establish a separatist slave empire in the US is the day a cultural center (not a mosque) can't be built 2 blocks from where something bad happened. Until every single mention of the Civil War mentions the South was a slave empire, and apologizes every time, until every reference to the oppressors of native americans is expunged from anywhere near tribal lands and their statues amended with their bloody history. Until the shame and abjection is shared by all, the bigoted opportunists howling about something which is not a mosque and not at ground zero - which isn't sacred ground but a massive for profit business park with a memorial - is just a whiny jerk to be ignored.

Also, being a good citizen means telling bigots to go stuff it.
I totally agree with the first half of your post here.

Then you suddenly go into a bizarre bit where you say that a Muslim community building a Muslim community center in the middle of a Muslim community is a bad thing for the American community.

I’m Jewish. We have Jewish community centers. If Jewish community centers are okay, then Muslim community centers are okay. If Muslim community centers are inherently an attack on America as a culture, then so are Jewish community centers.

Which means that, if you’re against Park51, you’re a danger to me.

My rant is here:

http://xiphias.livejournal.com/575906.html
woman, a teacher, a vegetarian, a postgrad, a wonderful friend, devoted to her very close-knit family, and a lot of fun to work and play with. She doesn't wear hijab, but her sister chooses to.

My point is - Elu isn't "those scary unassimilated Muslims' your dehumanizing words describe. She's a person, as complex and unique as any other person, as any other member of her congregation, of our city, or of this country. Insulting my friend and her congregation insults me.

Here's what her sister has to say about all of this:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dinu-ahmed/muslim-women-on-park51_b_711254.html

I think these young women say it best: they are Americans, they are NYC born and bred (you can't get much more American than Stuyvesant HS), they actually LIVE where the community center will be built (have for several generations, in fact) and have a perfect right not to have to constantly defend themselves against bogus attacks on their personhood and American-ness.

Ms. Moon, I used to read your books. I am very disappointed to see this uncritical and bigoted response to what seems to me to be an extremely unambiguous issue. If we still believe in American values, in the Constitution and the ideas presented therein....the only possible and logical response is to not merely "allow" or "tolerate" mosques to be built, but to actively encourage all Americans to practice the religious faiths of their choice (or, as in my case, the lack of faith) and fight with all our might against those who would suppress such a critical freedom.

It's unamerican to allow this kind of blatant, cynically manipulated discrimination to even have a place in the public discourse.
I feel that I personally (and many others) lean over backwards to put up with these things, to let Muslims believe stuff that unfits them for citizenship, on the grounds of their personal freedom.

One's personal beliefs do not, and cannot, unfit one for citizenship. There is no loyalty test for being an American citizen, no "you must believe nine of the following fifteen precepts to become a citizen." Nor should there be.

One of the Congresspeople of my state is a Muslim, the first ever elected to the House. He was elected by the people of his district, the citizens of that district, who went out and voted for him as is their right, duty, and privilege. Would you tell him he ought to reconsider serving, as his being Muslim might be too upsetting for the Congresspeople from New York? Is perhaps his juris doctorate somewhat lessened in validity because he acquired it while Muslim? Do you think that his dedication to the American rule of law is suspect because he follows the teachings of Mohammed?

(Incidentally, he was born in Michigan, and therefore never had to "assimilate" to American customs and values. Conflating being a Muslim with being an immigrant is a mistake.)

I cannot even begin to tell you how deeply it disturbs me that you seem to hint at the idea that a Muslim is less of a citizen because of his or her religion. We mustn't go down that path. Nothing good will come of it.

THANK YOU.

I got to that line and my blood ran cold. How -- how, in a post on good citizenship -- can someone act as though allowing Muslims their beliefs is some kind of goddamned favor conferred on them by people bending over backwards to let them live here in spite of their religion making them "unfit" to be citizens? In this country, where freedom of
religion is one of our core values?! I don't have words for how appalled I am.

*I cannot even begin to tell you how deeply it disturbs me that you seem to hint at the idea that a Muslim is less of a citizen because of his or her religion. We mustn't go down that path. Nothing good will come of it.*

This. A thousand times this.

(Reply) (Parent) (Thread) (Expand)

**From: naomikritzer**
2010-09-15 05:55 pm (local)

*It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent national gifts. 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, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.* --George Washington, *in his letter to the Touro Synagogue* in Rhode Island, 1790

(Reply) (Parent) (Thread)

**From: mishamish**
2010-09-16 07:39 am (local)

All to often, recently, those who quote the rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" seem to think that they are rights created and licensed to the citizens of the United States by the Constitution (even though they are actually in the Declaration of Independence). Reading back to the BEGINNING of the sentence though shows that the Declaration drafters said "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

To parse that sentence: It's blatantly obvious that all people ALREADY HAVE the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

No government gives it to them. Their Creator (Nota Bene: not Yahweh... Creator. And atheists can take comfort that this was based on the Virginia Declaration of Rights which holds no mention of a Creator) gives it to them. We just recognize it, call it self-evident to challenge anyone who wishes to deny it and declare it as a central premise to the kind of show we intend to run here.
To sum it: We don't give those rights to anyone. But BY CREATOR, we intend to make sure no-one takes them away!

From: hep kitten  
2010-09-16 11:09 am (local)

aside: my atheist SO has always believed "creator" just means the universe. i always thought that was a very sweet way to personally quantify it.

From: cider cupcakes  
2010-09-16 06:12 am (local)

I cannot even begin to tell you how deeply it disturbs me that you seem to hint at the idea that a Muslim is less of a citizen because of his or her religion. We mustn't go down that path.

Godwin's in action, maybe, but: from my Jewish perspective, FUCKING SERIOUSLY.

From: maevele  
2010-09-15 02:02 pm (local)

I had been a fan. I was really looking forward to you being guest of honor at Wiscon next year. I am now kinda sick that my favorite con is honoring someone capable of such anti islamic statements. I'm really concerned with how my muslim friends may be even more marginalized at the con this year, since even the guest of honor thinks they are unfit for citizenship based on their beliefs. I'm glad others are pointing out what is so hurtful, because I am too upset to do so in a respectful manner.

From: montieth  
2010-09-15 02:25 pm (local)

Well if their beliefs are that the Constitution should be subservient to the law of islam, then yes, they would in fact be unfit as citizens.
"Hai, I want to join your organization. I want to destroy it from within and change it to match my own beliefs, I don't believe in what you do but I want to join? Is that ok?"

(Reply) (Parent) (Thread)

From: pnkrokhockeymom
2010-09-15 02:35 pm (local)

If you don't think you've got a significant number of Christians in congress right now who believe that the Constitution should be subservient to their beliefs, you're just flat out wrong.

The difference is that they are in power, and instead of being viewed as "changing" the Constitution to fit the belief, they just "interpret" it that way and assert it should be that way, or assert that it was created to be that way.

(Reply) (Parent) (Thread)

From: montieth
2010-09-15 02:53 pm (local)

If you don't think you've got a significant number of Christians in congress right now who believe that the Constitution should be subservient to their beliefs, you're just flat out wrong.

The difference is that they are in power, and instead of being viewed as "changing" the Constitution to fit the belief, they just "interpret" it that way and assert it should be that way, or assert that it was created to be that way.

Change that from Christians to Congressmen and you'll be more accurate.

One of my fundamental issues with ALL of congress over the past 70 or so years has been their failure to remotely abide by the constitution and the limits on congress in all things they write in various bills and resolutions.

YES there are Christians in congress who have a view that I should be of their religion.

However, I have yet to fill out a form mandated by the government detailing how I worship nor have I paid any taxes relating to my religious preferences. However, I have seen any number of attempts at other aspects of the 1st amendment by people on both sides of the aisle.

More so, I have had to fill out numerous forms relating to how I exercise my 2nd
amendment freedoms, §922 is rife with various examples of restrictions, prior restraint and gross curtailment of my 2nd Amendment rights.

And for another matter, there's just as many Morality police on the left side of the aisle as there are on the right side. One name....Tipper. Have you lost your morality because of rock music yet?

I don't even know what to say in response to this. I suspect it's sort of useless to engage.

I'll just point out that MY comment to you doesn't say anything about left or right, and it certainly doesn't assert that I have some weird belief that all politicians "on the left" (whatever that means to you, if you've got Tipper Gore in there I would guess "on the left" simply equates to "democrat" which is absurd) are somehow never morality police. I don't know what you're responding to here, but I suspect it's some species of straw-progressive that I haven't yet encountered in the wild.

I grew up in and around Detroit, in communities with large arabic populations--Christian and Muslim. I guess I just see people differently than you do, because none of the Muslims I grew up with were trying to impose some other country's laws on me and no one ever tried to convert me (which is more than I can say for a lot of Christians). Mostly we were, you know, going to our high schools' football games or watching our babies play in the front yard. They were just, you know, community members. People. Human beings trying to make the pep squad or put out the yearbook or get a driver's license or raise their families. Equally entitled under the law to live their fucking lives.
I'll just point out that MY comment to you doesn't say anything about left or right, and it certainly doesn't assert that I have some weird belief that all politicians "on the left" (whatever that means to you, if you've got Tipper Gore in there I would guess "on the left" simply equates to "democrat" which is absurd) are somehow never morality police. I don't know what you're responding to here, but I suspect it's some species of straw-progressive that I haven't yet encountered in the wild.

I'm sorry, I assumed that you were a liberal making some accusatory statements about the failure of the Christian politicians to abide by the constitution while giving a pass to the non Christians who tell us that they're not bound by it at all. You know, that whole living document that we keep hearing about.

I was admitting that yes, there are members of congress that need to be beaten about the head and ears with a full hard bound volume of the Constitution. But, that right now, the ones we REALLY have to worry about are the liberals who are at present, as you say, "changing" the Constitution to fit the belief, they just "interpret" it that way and assert it should be that way, or assert that it was created to be that way.' This would include things like making us all buy healthcare and calling a fine for not doing so a tax.

Oh, I am a progressive. I'm not a liberal; they are far to center of the road for me. I'm also a lawyer. If you really want to have rigorous, thoughtful criticism of principles of constitutional law, however, you're going to need to stop lumping the legislative activities of liberals and conservatives together and start actually learning the theories of constitutional interpretation and reading the opinions. Conservatives are every bit as guilty of "changing, interpreting, asserting" about the Constitution, they just generally pretend otherwise. There are just as many activist conservative judges as there are activist liberal ones, although you should know that given that our legal system (with some state exceptions) is generally a common law system, making law through the judiciary is, in fact, precisely what is supposed to happen.

Healthcare, though, just FYI, right now, anyway, isn't a constitutional law issue, though, and taxation for any number of reasons is expressly anticipated in the constitution and is a power expressly granted thereby to Congress. Congress really can tax you for any gigantically large number of reasons. So can your state. All on the up and up.
I don't even know you but I love you so hard right now.

From: onceupon
2010-09-15 04:23 pm (local)

I typoed, however, and typed "to" when I meant "too."

From: pnkrokhockeymom
2010-09-15 04:29 pm (local)

:)  

you're going to need to stop lumping the legislative activities of liberals and conservatives together and start actually learning the theories of constitutional interpretation and reading the opinions.

If they exert legal power they cannot exert why does it matter if they're liberal or conservative? I certainly hope you're not of the mind that a law is fine constitutionally as long as it's not your ox being gored.

There are just as many activist conservative judges as there are activist liberal ones, although you should know that given that our legal system (with some state exceptions) is generally a common law system, making law through the judiciary is, in fact, precisely what is supposed to happen.

Yes, I get that. I'm not a stranger to law or legal decisions. And I get that precedent can be binding and extra legislative, but something should not be distorted so much that it ceases to have any meaning. (Public use for example)

If one wants to change the Constitution, Article V. is one's remedy. One don't change it by slowly drifting the meaning of a limit on power so as to be essentially meaningless. A whole line of stare decisis ending in Kelo v. City of New London has stripped any limit that "public use" may have had from the Takings Clause.
Healthcare, though, just FYI, right now, anyway, isn't a constitutional law issue, though, and taxation for any number of reasons is expressly anticipated in the constitution and is a power expressly granted thereby to Congress. Congress really can tax you for any gigantically large number of reasons. So can your state. All on the up and up.

It isn't? There certainly are a lot of lawsuits blooming about it. One aspect I find interesting is the dancing about with regard to taxes and fines where it concerns the mandate for purchasing insurance. They couch the fine as a tax, but taxes are not the same as fines are they? Case law specifically supports this point. (United States v. La Franca and United States v. Mississippi Tax Comm') I love this bit from La Franca "No mere exercise of the art of lexicography can alter the essential nature of an act or a thing; and if an exaction be clearly a penalty it cannot be converted into a tax by the simple expedient of calling it such."

More so, Article I. Section 8. doesn't give Congress authority to FORCE us to buy a good or service. If Congress can mandate that ALL of us must by X product then what can they not make us by or purchase? Can a group of politicians make us all buy stock in their company? Where would such a power derive?

A great deal of case law and legislation has more or less undone a many of the limits of the Constitution. I can't see that as a positive thing. Again, if you want to change the Constitution itself, see Article V. The courts should not have the ability to change the meaning of the Constitution. The Constitution creates the courts, not the other way around.

The point though is that Congressmen have stated recently that they do not feel bound by the Constitution. US v Lopez is another interesting case. There you have Congress ignoring explicit case law and re-passing a §922(q) with "findings" to somehow tenuously support their objectives. That's why I point to as congressmen unimpeded by ANY limits of the Constitution or any other entity.

§922(o) is also interesting. The government will fine you and jail you for not paying a tax that they won't let you pay. US v Rock Island Armory makes for interesting case law reading. Of course it's NOT binding for anything BUT that case since the Federal Attorney didn't appeal. I expect we'll see some challenges to that again in a few years.

From: ø etumukutenvak
2010-09-16 05:41 am (local)
::applauds::
I can't say it any better than 🌟 pnkrokhockeymom did.

and such a significant number of american muslims feel that way.

Even if people did think that, why the hell should it matter?

This is fuckin' America - the point is that people can believe whatever the hell they want, and we're all citizens regardless.

This, this, this! The idea that certain kinds of Americans should *not* exercise their freedoms in order to be considered "American enough" just Does Not Compute.

There are people in a wide variety of demographic groups who would prefer that the Constitution be made subordinate to their own personal brand of whatever. Why is it only Muslims who are assumed to be anti-American until proven otherwise?
This comment does not represent the personal opinions of the commentor.

9/11! 9/11! 9/11! 9/11!

(Repeat as necessary.)

Re: This comment does not represent the personal opinions of the commentor.

*montieth* seems to be carefully avoiding the obvious point that although 9/11 was the single most deadly terrorist attack in our history, the second most deadly such attack was the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.

Does that mean we should treat angry white guys who collect guns and constantly quote the Constitution the same way we treat angry brown guys who go to pilot school and constantly quote the Quran? I think it does.

And yet the very thing that you think should be defended from thoughtcrime, the Constitution, says that there should be no such thing as thoughtcrime!

OMG PARADOX

Seriously, you can either accept the seeming paradox of "Everyone has the right to believe what they wish, including believing that everyone does NOT have the right to believe as they wish" (which is, really, not all that much of a paradox) or you can try to reject it and stumble facefirst into the ACTUAL paradox of "Everyone must be forced to believe that there should be no force in matters of belief!", which is fundamentally logically impossible and will ultimately end in you turning "freedom" into a meaningless abstraction that you use to defend tyranny.
Please see the Constitutionally defined term of Treason. Article 3 Section 3, the operative terms are "or in adhering to their Enemies".

People holding Pro-NAZI rallies in WWII America would in fact fall under that definition would they not?

OMG but then there was a First Amendment to the Constitution, and if my tiny brain understands how this whole concept of "amending" things works, it's that adding a new clause to a legal document intentionally supersedes previous clauses, much less superseding mere *implications* of previous clauses that some people stretch out of the actual wording.

So, for instance, the *full* passage you are quoting reads "Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying War against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort."

I.e. the only people who are traitors are the ones who actually fight against the United States or who give *actual* "aid and comfort" to those doing so -- and if it weren't clear from context that "aid and comfort" means, y'know, actual physical aid and comfort (providing resources and land to armies fighting against the USA) then the First Amendment clarifies that by specifically *amending* the Constitution to give Congress no power to restrict people's actions in matters of speech, the press, RELIGION and PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY.

If a specific group of Muslims is actually holding a rally specifically designed to engineer violence against the United States we can talk about whether they're traitors. Calling any person a traitor because they may simply hold the belief that the United States should not exist as presently constituted and peacefully express said belief is utter bullshit.

Calling a person a traitor by *association* simply because they have a religion that has the *same name* as a handful of fanatics who took up arms against the United States is EVEN MORE BULLSHIT. It is, in fact, this kind of bullshit that the Framers specifically outlawed in the second sentence of this section ("No attainder of treason shall work
corruption of blood", i.e. there will be no punishment of families or bloodline groups for the actions of individual traitors, and indeed no action other than the punishment and/or execution of the personal traitors themselves).

And it's doubly hilarious (in the laughing while crying way) that the Cordoba Initiative is being depicted as the equivalent of "pro-Nazi rallies during World War II".

You are aware that this "mosque" is not a mosque at all but an interfaith prayer room, where services from several denominations will be held and where *any* religious group can apply to hold services or events, right? The very *nature* of the *concept* of an interfaith center hosted by Muslims but open to all is the fucking OPPOSITE of the war for Islamic supremacy you claim is inherent to all Muslim beliefs.

You're basically saying that if we're fighting a war against the Nazis then all German-Americans who have any sort of German cultural center, including some anti-war German Catholics who voted Social Democrat before leaving Germany and are organizing a cultural center about the history of democratic and pacifistic thought in German philosophy and literature, should be shouted out of town for giving "aid and comfort to the enemy". Because *anything* identifiably German is Nazi -- the enemy is an entire cultural tradition and everything within it, and there can be no opposition to the enemy from within its own "territory".

You are, in other words, a really horrific bigot whose thinking runs along the exact really horrific lines that led to the massive injustice of the internment camps in World War II.

Beat another useless strawman, okay?
if their beliefs are that the Constitution should be subservient to the law of islam,

Since when do American Muslims think that? Oh wait, they generally don’t.

It would be nice if you, Ms. Moon, and everyone agreeing with you showed any capability for research, any actual knowledge of American Muslims, or, heck, common sense before spouting off your bigoted hypotheticals to scare people into agree with you. That is some Fox News bullshit right there.

Don't spoil his argument with silly things like facts.

I just want to mention that there was a Muslim prayer center IN the WTC.

I suspect you may also benefit from analyzing this venn diagram:
This isn't scientific, but I think the problem with the New York Mosque controversy is that the people who are upset can't tell the little red circle from the blue area or from the larger circle encompassing both.

I figured if I drew them a picture, they might get it better.

The people in the red circle hate the people in OUR circle, including the people in the blue area. If YOU hate the people outside the red circle, you aren't paying attention.

Edited at 2010-09-15 02:27 pm (local)
(Reply) (Thread)

From: tithenai
2010-09-15 03:53 pm (local)

Thank you so much.
(Reply) (Parent) (Thread) (Expand)

From: onceupon
2010-09-15 04:24 pm (local)

<3
(Reply) (Parent) (Thread)
A better diagram would include members of all islamist militant groups, which would bring the number up to a few hundred thousand, a few million if you count non-combatant supporters. And there is _some_ overlap of blue and red, though less than there is of red and big white. Still, the sentiment is good.

Uhh, and can we also include all the Xtian fundamentalist dominionists who are willing to commit violence for their religious beliefs? - because that would occupy a nice big chunk of the "America" circle." Some say up to 40%!

The sentiment my ass. Fundamentalism is ALWAYS dangerous. Stop applying it to any one religion exclusively.

Yes, let us split that hair.

Judging an entire religion with a population four times that of the entirety of the United States of America because of a population the size of Nixa, Missouri is wrong, but it could be right to judge the religion because of a population the size of Killeen, Texas.

That diagram is brilliant; do you mind if I use it elsewhere? I will certainly credit the work.
Hm. 31 billion Americans? I assume it should be 310 million? (Other than that, it's a great image!)

It says .31 billion.

Ah, so it does. On my laptop screen the image is small, so I missed the decimal.

Yeah I had to squint lol.

I'm really not sure how you think being a massive racist is being part of the solution rather than part of the problem.
But she says that SOME Muslims "have all the virtues of civilized people," so she's totally not racist. That's how this works.

From: elusis
2010-09-15 07:05 pm (local)

Well, it's important to acknowledge the good darkies who know their place.

From: emily_goddess
2010-09-16 11:11 am (local)

Nah, she's probably talking about the white Muslims.

From: scarypudding
2010-09-16 12:24 pm (local)

You just won the thread.

From: pnkrokhockeymom
2010-09-15 02:39 pm (local)

I am so disappointed.

I gather from some of your comments responding to critics that you think you said something other than you did. I recommend you pay attention to the repellant opinions being tossed about by your supporters in the comments to determine if you need to clarify your position. You might also check the facts this opinion is based on.

If your point of view is actually "it's bad citizenship to upset the right-wing bigoted majority, because they might be violent" then I wonder how you feel about my reproductive rights, and my ability to obtain health care related thereto? It upsets the right-wing bigoted majority. If the right-wing bigoted majority acts badly because they are bigoted, that's on them, not the folks they are behaving in a bigoted fashion toward.

That recommendation? Nothing more than a recommendation to cave to the bullies.
*applause* (for this and your other comments)

From: rhipowered
2010-09-15 02:53 pm (local)

So, other people have touched on things better and more eloquently than I have, including someone I generally despise, which, honestly, says something about this post.

But I did want to add that, in addition to my disgust with the anti-Islamic commentary, I am really completely bewildered by your vague references to and insistence on very specific sociocultural normativity for US citizenship...or even societal participation.

How very 19th century. Or, if you're paying attention to the news, how very France/Belgium/Switzerland. Acceptable norms, no matter how cheerful and sunshiney they may seem, and no matter how presumably focused on equal rights they appear (a la Sarkozy and burqa bans being for women's liberation), are both disguising bigotry and intensely relative to the times and places they appear.

Do your homework.

From: jennawaterford
2010-09-16 10:27 am (local)

*stage whisper* I know who you mean in para 1. And I know, right?!

From: pantryslut
2010-09-15 03:29 pm (local)

I am just going to point out the crucial logical mistake you're making of assuming that Muslims = immigrants. Hint: that's a big "oops."
There are a lot of things about this post that I find problematic, that others have addressed more eloquently than I.

But as a life-long resident of New York City, I need to say two things.

The first is that Manhattan is a remarkably small land mass for its population density. What constitutes "near" or "in" an area to people who live elsewhere would, in many cases, puts you off the island here. While I'm not familiar with your relationship to my city, and therefore may be saying something that's not entirely relevant to one of the problems I have with this post, I must point out that it's not useful, helpful or accurate to these discussions when people who do not live here talk about what is, or isn't, appropriate in terms of where we put stuff here.

The second (and this goes out to some of those commenting here too), is that, up until 9/11 I heard constantly that living here meant I wasn't a real American because of any number of demographic and political groupings I supposedly (and often do) find myself a member of. Since 9/11, I, and every other resident of this city, has had to put up with a lot of people speaking in our name. That speech has often supported ill-considered war, hate, political ideologies with which many of us do not agree, and claims as to our emotions, our scars, and our feelings for our neighbors. Please don't do it, explicitly or implicitly. It adds insult to very real injury.

As another resident of Manhattan, who lived downtown during the WTC tragedy and has chronic health problems as a result, I would like to second this comment.

I've read your post carefully, and your follow-up comments, and I believe I understand what you're trying to say. I also understand your frustration at people reacting as if you had written some conventional racist rant; there's certainly a distinction between "those
people shouldn't have done this because their actions harm the fabric of the community we share" and "those people shouldn't have done this because they're a bunch of nasty little brown people who know only hate", and I generally agree with what you said about the importance of community and civic duty.

But I wanted to let you know that all that given, I still found your post repugnant. Partly for the reason that pnkrokhockeymom articulated better -- that sometimes upsetting people *is* a civic duty, depending on the principles at stake. I too deplore the ammunition that this has given some of the nastiest groups in our politics, and the possibility that they'll use it to help gain power and push through regressive policies. But as holzman notes, the prayer room at this center is needed to *make it possible for community members to practice their faith*. I believe the Founding Fathers would approve of upsetting people in order to achieve this goal.

The other reason this post makes me cringe is that parts of what you say give me the impression that you've taken on more toxic anti-Islam/racist ideas than you realize. It's the uncritical assumptions that this is a mosque, that the people building it are immigrants; it's the annoyance at someone giving a talk about Islam for not going into its fundamentalist and violent sects, and talking about the "forebearance" that we (collectively?) have given Muslims (which ones?); it's the impression I get that you're replying to comments that arguably misread your argument and are easy to 'shoot down', but not the ones that point out your factual errors and missing context. Of course, I don't know you; I could be wrong. But please consider the possibility that you don't know you as well as you thought, either; I know from experience that these kinds of ideas are insidious, can sneak in invisibly from the culture around us, and are horrifically harmful to those on the receiving end (often, in aggregate, more harmful than the rare acts of actual racist or other-ist violence).

You might also consider whether some of the people responding angrily did in fact understand the point you were trying to make, but are responding to these implications -- which are present in your text, whether you intended it or not -- rather just the explicit point you had in mind.

(Reply) (Thread)

From: tithenai
2010-09-15 05:59 pm (local)

You are so wonderful. Thank you for this. *hugs*
I'm glad for this comment, but I need to add one thing:

Why does anyone give a flying fuck what the Founding Fathers would think about anything?

They were not paragons of virtue. They were men. They were men who mostly approved of the oppression of women, people of color, non-Christians, the poor, and so on. They had some very good ideas, but let's not pretend that those ideas existed in a magical progressive vacuum away from their very bad ideas. That's anti-historical nonsense. They wanted to enact beautiful revolutionary ideals -- for some. Not for all.

This! Design and intent are interesting, but it's whether a thing – a country, a community centre, a blog post – is working (and for whom) that are usually more salient for figuring out what to do.

I honestly did not realize a year ago how much the fucking CRUSADES were still a controversial subject for some ppl. I kind of miss not knowing.

Well, and considering that she gets the politics behind the Crusades wrong, it's a combination of hilarious and infuriating.
From: elusis
2010-09-16 12:02 am (local)

Hush, you.

From: scarypudding
2010-09-16 12:25 pm (local)

LOL.

From: cos
2010-09-15 05:41 pm (local)

Wow. WTF?

First of all, your painting of history is bizarrely distorted despite including some good points and actual facts - all of which you somehow twist into a misleading narrative. Someone reading your essay would be surprised to learn, for example, that today’s immigrants actually learn English more quickly than those of the past.

But then you really veer off into inexplicable insanity with the Muslim thing. We're talking about a community center in lower Manhattan for people who live in lower Manhattan - where you want them to build?? There are already some actual mosques in that neighborhood already - again, because Muslims live there. Your grandiose fantasy about this being an attempt at provocation, or how they "must have known", is a sign of such profound ignorance that I'm not surprised you fail to notice this community center's leader is a Sufi imam. Associating Sufis with al Qaeda is at least a little bit more ridiculous than protesting a Unitarian Church due to Christianity's hostility to LGBT people.

P.S. Your implicit equivalence of "Muslims" = "immigrants" is a form of racism, even if you innocently didn't mean it that way. You do not actually know that the Muslims living in lower Manhattan who will benefit from this community center were all born in foreign countries; I'm willing to bet many of them were born in the US, and even in New York itself. Of course, it's New York City, where every neighborhood, whatever races and religions are common there, has a lot of immigrants. Being an immigrant in New York City fits right in already.
For that matter, there was a Muslim prayer center *inside* the South Tower of the World Trade Center, which was destroyed along with everything else.

Sure, And there's one inside the Pentagon. What a provocation! Couldn't the military have known it would raise a big stink? Oh, wait, it didn't.

I dare anyone to look at this picture of Elsheba Khan and her son's headstone and talk about assimilation now. God, this while fucking discussion makes me furious.

“I've tried to be objective”

“But in a multicultural society like ours--and it has been multi-cultural from its inception”

I would like to address this claim, since it is fairly incorrect. Yes, it was multicultural - but only for the privileged white people. Only for the slavers. Only for the men. And then on top of all that any time someone spoke out against the status quo they were condemned as heretics, said to be against the state, against the Church, against all that is Moral and Right.

Added to all of that, in the early 1900s the US with its shining constitution and human rights efforts decided that what was best for the country was to not accept immigrants, to
close its borders completely and melt the existing cultures into proper Americana.

Eventually that stopped. But the foundations are no longer truly based on those original precepts. It’s become a nation where politicians are elected on which religious rules they follow: vocal Republicans are against the right of free women to choose when or even if they want to have children (this isn’t even about abortion, but contraception in general), and they are against legal partnerships for gays and lesbians, to name two examples. Large portions of the population believe and vote for these people because their religious beliefs mirror their own.

In a recent survey of the US, it was found that 18% of Americans believe that Obama is a Muslim. That means almost a fifth of the population believe the leader of their country is a terrorist, since only the fundamentalists or the truly ignorant would believe such a preposterous claim. This would indicate that one fifth of the country is just as fundamental and/or ignorant as you claim Muslims are.

In an ideal world with a truly multicultural society that embraces all non-violent ways of life and faith (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Atheism), we could all be good citizens.

But apparently that won’t be today. I realize that you didn’t intend to come off this way, but your statements, even taken in context, are deeply troubling.

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From: trinker
2010-09-15 08:27 pm (local)
I own an almanac.

Re: I've tried to be objective

...and other religious paths as well.

From: chaotic_nipple
2010-09-15 06:13 pm (local)
Wow. The post started out so well before going downhill. And I had just friended you too. Oh well.

From: fengi
2010-09-15 07:22 pm (local)
"I feel that I personally (and many others) lean over backwards to put up with these things, to let Muslims believe stuff that unfit them for citizenship, on the grounds of their personal freedom."

You aren't leaning over backwards just bending over to spit on an entire religion for the beliefs of the extreme.

Also if those things "unfit" people for citizenry, well a vast amount of [Texans / Mormons / Scientologists / 4chan members / Ayn Rand readers / Juggalos / Christians / Sci-Fi Conventioneers / furries / New Yorkers / Twihards / pick your group] hav "unfit" themselves for having members who espouse that you deem nation harming in their midst. But this includes yourself, who seems to not remember the words of Lincoln or Martin Luther King or George Washington. It's not America the hive mind. Deeming people unfit for not adhering to the status quo is what the founders were fleeing, and balancing one's individuality with the state is pretty much what many who founded this nation were seeking. And even some of them were terribly uninterested in assimilating with anyone but themselves. As was their right.

Honestly, go read Letter From A Birmingham jail again. The frustrating "white moderate" it refers to is people like you.

Edited at 2010-09-15 08:07 pm (local)

(Reply) (Thread)

From: fengi
2010-09-15 07:25 pm (local)

Also you essentially equated building a community center on private land to the acts of Ken Lay who laid waste to our economy and sabotaged California's entire electricity grid. If you think of such rhetorical nastiness are the words of a good citizen, well all the gods help our poor country.

(Reply) (Thread)

From: meopta
2010-09-15 07:54 pm (local)

"But Muslims fail to recognize how much forbearance they've had."

I remember Jim Crow too. I learned from it.

I have a Muslim aunt. I have a Jewish aunt. My family invaded before 1670 and I used to
have a collection of Elizabeth Moon books.

Saying there are 'good' Muslims does not negate what is essentially a position from a point of privilege and hate. On behalf of the generations of my family that have erred and succeeded and served and died and been elected, I resent this attempt to tie intolerance to citizenship.

I am a proud American. I denounce your views while I support your right to have them. I am not 'letting' you have them, I am supporting your RIGHT to have them.

(Reply) (Thread)

From: tropism
2010-09-15 10:16 pm (local)

Wow, Elizabeth. You made many good points before spinning off into crazy-bigot-fantasy land.

Also, I don't think people have so much of a problem with you saying that putting the center there would upset people, but with the fact that you've basically said that all muslims (who are also evidently all immigrants) are untrustworthy, not worthy of citizenship, etc, etc, etc.

It surprised me to see you spouting something like this -- though after reading it, it didn't surprise me to see that you are a Texan, a state as bigoted, insular, and anti-American as you're implying all muslims are. (I dare you to contradict me with a straight face. If there's a state that screams 'Really! We're still fighting the Civil War! It's just a flesh wound!' it's Texas. You folk down there seem to pride yourselves on it.)

But of course, you're a woman, and women are congenitally incapable of coherent thought about anything serious, right? I mean, if you're gonna dredge up tired racist arguments which have, frankly, been applied to pretty much every racial group which was currently deprecated by the public/people in power, I see no reason not to turn it around on you. And I guess you think them niggers shoulda stayed at the back of the bus, too, not upset everyone by sitting in the front, right?

When people like you say things like this, and then go on to wonder -why- muslim communities are insular, well, can you blame them? When they've got well-meaning bigots like you standing outside, saying that they don't deserve the protection of citizens? When innocent people have to deal with harassment and attacks simply because they 'look' Muslim? There's a reason that ghettos form, and it's not just because all 'those people' like eachother and speak the same language. It's the herd pulling together against the wolves, fish shoaling against the shark.
And delude yourself to think that a good citizen can countenance attitudes such as the ones you're spouting. Fuck that. That's just not right, and such an upstanding 'citizen' as yourself should realize that.

A -real- Citizen looks at his neighbors -- indeed, all of his countrymen, and even those who are not also citizens -- as people and treats them as such, not as some monolithic bugaboo. That's part of all that 'bending over backwards' stuff that you seem to hate.

A -real- Citizen learns the facts before sounding off on a subject, particularly if that person has the responsibilities that come with being influential.

A -real- citizen speaks out against injustices and calumnies like the ones that you're perpetuating, and which have been perpetuated by the news organizations throughout this country.

A -real- Citizen works to build bridges between people, as people, simply because they're people. Bridges between communities will follow in an organic way.

A -real- Citizen doesn't say or intimate that another group's rights as Citizens should be stripped away for some reason, because he realises that, come a change in power, what's to keep someone from doing the same to him?

You? Your attitudes place you pretty much in the same boat as those "Let's round up all the gays/Jews/Blacks/Japs and send them to a camp/island/back to Africa/Back to Israel/just shoot 'em" assholes. Or at least, you can spit on them from where you're standing.

...And you should spit on them, 'cause that's the duty of a Citizen against those who're truly working to tear the fabric of civic society. And that's what these assholes who're stirring up media attention about this are doing: spreading lies, spreading hate, spreading ignorance, spreading distrust and discord. You're helping to perpetuate idiot, reflexive feuding, the 'an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind' descent into fire and darkness which Ghandi correctly recognized and despised.

Am I pissed off? You might say so. I'm also greatly disappointed. I was a fan, but after seeing your views, I simply can't stomach supporting you.

...Also, since when the hell was 'unfit' a verb?

(Reply) (Thread)

From: tablesaw
2010-09-16 12:50 am (local)

...Also, since when the hell was 'unfit' a verb?
1611, according to Merriam-Webster.

From: haddayr
2010-09-15 10:20 pm (local)

I read this with slowly mounting horror, saw how much you made it EVEN WORSE in your responses to comments, and wrote to complain to WisCon's ConCom at your being a guest of honor after such a dishonorable post.

And I need to echo what my friend Naomi has said: when you attack Muslims -- when you say that they 'believe things that make them unfit for American citizenship,' you are attacking my fellow citizens. My neighbors, my friends, my kids' classmates, my political representatives (who seem pretty passionate about their citizenship and involvement, I might add).

I simply cannot stand for it. I cannot abide it. This post is un-American. This post is horribly, shockingly, appallingly wrong.

From: bitchet
2010-09-15 11:13 pm (local)

You are so woefully ignorant about Muslims and American Muslims in particular, that I don't even know where to begin. How do you equate people wanting to build a community center with terrorists? Or really, American Muslims with Muslims in other countries? Or assume that Muslims are all foreign-born? This post is like a Russian nesting doll of stupid, once I think I've seen enough, another layer is revealed.

I will simply assure you as someone who actually lives in an area with a large Muslim population (the Southwest side of Chicago), they are good citizens and neighbors. Unlike you, however, as you appear to have little grasp of the ideals this country was founded upon, its requirements for citizenship, and a narrow-mind and a remarkably paranoid nature.

From: marydell
2010-09-16 09:55 am (local)

Cosigned, by a Chicagoland neighbor.
I feel that I personally (and many others) lean over backwards to put up with these things, to let Muslims believe stuff that unfits them for citizenship, on the grounds of their personal freedom.

Perhaps I personally (and many others) let too many Christians believe stuff that unfits them for citizenship. Many of them believe this should be (or, worse, already is) a Christian nation, which is unfit in my view. It leads to things like Proposition 8.

As an Irish-American, I'm very aware that, for a time, IRA terrorists were very much the popular media scapegoat of convenience, something that started shifting to Muslims in the late 80s. The Irish were sort of an interim scapegoat between the Russians (and communists generally) and Muslims, the US needing that kind of media outlet after the Berlin wall fell when we suddenly were in the awkward position of having our former foes on our side.

Aside from Irish Catholics, who many Christians would argue aren't Christian at all, there have been no systematic popularizing of Christian terrorists or Jewish terrorists (as examples) in my 51-year lifespan.

In Beverly Tatum's book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* she says:

"If we live in an environment in which we are bombarded with stereotypical images in the media, are frequently exposed to the ethnic jokes of friends and family members, and are rarely informed of the accomplishments of oppressed groups, we will develop the negative categorizations of those groups that form the basis of prejudice."

So I ask: what are the positive accomplishments *that you know of* by American Muslims?

Oh hay I heard about you on the internets!

Would you like to play a guessing game with me about who exactly tried to beat me to death in a church bathroom and/or have me committed at my high school for being gay?
(Hint: it was none of the Muslims at my school, all of which were born in the United States.)

From: winterfox
2010-09-16 02:27 am (local)

Lady, you are batshit fucking insane and a raging, ignorant, head-in-ass bigot. I'd say you ought to do yourself a favor and shut up while you are ahead, but you've always been way behind, so...

From: anilmenon.myopenid.com
2010-09-16 03:53 am (local)

Citizenship
Interesting arguments, Elizabeth. Agreed with a lot, disagreed with a lot too.

Ref: "...the person with no loyalty to anything but his/her own pleasure...is a pathetic failure as a human being."

Not necessarily. I suspect it's only when every person in a group is dedicated to the *same* set of pleasures (profit-making, environment-saving, basket-weaving, femfataltron repairing, whatever) that we run into problems. A society with selfers defining pleasure in myriad ways could, in balance, be a lot saner than one filled with responsible, civic-minded, altruistic busybodies super-alert to any and all threats to the body republic.

You speak of integration as a way to offset our innate tribalism. But what's more tribal than the concept of a nation? The idea that people in such-and-such region are bound in a common enterprise may well be a useful fiction, but it's a fiction nonetheless. That we bleed for it, weep over it, choke-up over it, pray, mutilate and march for it, doesn't make it any less of a fiction. It's easy to be critical about the evils of this set of tribal beliefs or that set of tribal beliefs, but as long as the idea of tribal loyalty exists-- the idea of a necessary loyalty to an "imagined community" as Benedict Anderson put it-- none of these evils are going away.

Anil
Yeah, this. I can't get past over how blinkered the idea of "civic-mindedness" stopping at
the nation-state level -- as opposed to being a general desire to help one's neighbors and
fellow human beings in the world at large -- seems to be.

The reason the story mentioned, "The Man Without A Country", always seemed dumb to
me is that it's not the *country* that's important, it's having family and friends and people
who care about you. Anyone who had to live as a prisoner on board a ship as an itinerant
wanderer would get depressed whether they had official legal citizenship in a country or
not. People who get all fucking judgmental about immigrant communities not being part
of the "real America" don't seem to get that when you have a country as big as this one
there will be many different Americas in it, and the "cocoons" Ms. Moon talks about may
in fact be actually larger and more diverse and inclusive than the one she lives in -- but
she judges them for not overlapping with *her* cocoon, white upper-middle-class
"mainstream" America that holds the levers of power and the media in its grasp, and so
they're the ones who get the finger shaken at them and told to improve.

For all that Ms. Moon claims to be evenhanded and trying to see the situation objectively,
her post STILL boils down to a statement that the burden of change rests more heavily on
the shoulders of those she labels outsiders -- those who have to "prove themselves" --
then on the comfortable "real Americans" who are already on the inside.

I mean, shit, why? Muslim-Americans are NOT any less American than I am. If the idea
of a "Ground Zero mosque" makes me uncomfortable, why is it incumbent on them to
change their actions as opposed to me to change my attitudes? Why shouldn't the angry
white folks be the ones being lectured to be more "civic-minded" by showing some
decency and compassion toward their neighbors?

This is why the idea of one unified tribal loyalty superseding all others is so problematic
-- because no matter what you SAY, the result will be that you're taking one existing tribe
and putting them above others. Saying "We should eliminate the hyphenations from our
name and just be 'Americans'" tends to mean, in practice, that all the different kinds of
American should erase the things that make them themselves so they can be more like
mainstream white Americans, while mainstream white Americans can stay basically as
they are.
When I first saw this blog post I failed to read far enough down.

I will look forward to your blog post on Christian atrocities throughout the world including those in the UK which were often paid for by Christian US citizens.

"I will look forward to your blog post on Christian atrocities throughout the world including those in the UK which were often paid for by Christian US citizens."

My husband, who was only a couple of miles away from the IRA bomb that destroyed the Arndale Center in Manchester, England (his dorm was within hearing-range of said explosion), would say the same, given the US's wholehearted, warm welcome of individuals like Gerry Adams.

I suspect the families of victims of the Omagh bombing, for whom no one has been convicted in a criminal court, and scores of other IRA bombings, might possibly feel the same way.

Remind me again how many Muslim civilians have been killed by Western troops in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Your post was an automatic fail as soon as you said this: When an Islamic group decided to build a memorial center at/near the site of the 9/11 attack, they should have been able to predict that this would upset a lot of people."

One, it's a community center, open to everyone of all faiths. It's not a memorial center or a mosque. Stop promoting bullshit rumours.

Two, it's two blocks away from Ground Zero. There's stores there, there's a fucking McDonald's two blocks away. Again, please stop promoting misinformed bullshit rumours.
Three, the 'Islamic group' wasn't the only ones to decide where it would be. The JEWISH Community Center of Manhattan has been advising them the WHOLE time how to plan it, where to place the site, everything.

Four, this has been in planning since at least 2009. And it's only caused a 'stink' now. Why? Because the American media is desperate to add any fuel it can to the anti-Muslim backlash.

Five, the Imam in charge of the project has dedicated his whole career to promoting interfaith relations, denouncing violence and encouraging Muslims to integrate with American culture. So I don't know why the fuck you're dragging 'Muslims need to start being American' into this BS.

Quite frankly, Ms Moon, the sole reason that this has caused a 'stink' is because of bigoted, misinformed Americans who will listen to whatever they're told about how bad and evil and anti-American Muslims are and you're sounding just like them. So, please get off your soapbox until you know what the hell you're talking about.

From: mnunnie
2010-09-16 06:52 am (local)
Re: Wow fail

You don't know me, but I love this comment :).

From: caerwynx
2010-09-16 11:25 am (local)
Re: Wow fail

Bravo. Seriously. Thank you.
many Muslims have all the virtues of civilized persons

Surely

many religious people have all the virtues of civilized persons, as we know that only atheists are truly civilised.

Or

many people unlike me have all the virtues of civilized persons, but only my people are civilized.

This.

So that's how you say, "They're a credit to their race" in the 21st century!

::makes notation in The Bigot's Phrasebook::

It was condescending in that very special Lady Catherine de Bourgh fashion. So very kind of one to acknowledge that a few select others might also be as civilized as one.
I think you're on to something here. I know how it works out in my own life, as a reader. I mean, personally, I'll give science fiction writers respect as intellectuals, as producers of literature, and as significant cultural citizens when they are finally willing to give up all the trappings of the childish fantastic and assimilate to the canonical aesthetic. Until then they have to expect that academics, reviewers, and the mainstream of taste will find them ridiculous, ignore or condemn them, and certainly accord them no weight as artists. Right?

Of course, I suspect that many scifi authors have all the virtues of real writers.

This comment nearly made me wish lj had a 'like' button. Nearly.

"But Muslims fail to recognize how much forbearance they’ve had."

Yeah, I guess I should thank my lucky crescent and star that the scumbags who burned down our Arab community center in Michigan (this in the 80s without even the '9/11 resentment' pretext to hide behind) only did so TWICE instead of three or four times. That cabbie in New York should be thankful the guy stabbed him instead of shooting him. Those Mosque-goers in fla. should be thankful the guy who brought a pipebomb into their house of worship set it off in the wrong part of the mosque. Jeez, why can't we appreciate the mercies we've been shown, like good little unwanted alien brown people?
"many Muslims have all the virtues of civilized persons and are admirable in all those ways."

Whew! I'd been avoiding looking in the mirror, for fear of seeing a raving, explosives-strapped barbarian waving a scimitar with one swarthy hand while beating his wife with the other. Glad to see I can go back to combing my hair without worry!

From: springheel_jack 2010-09-16 08:17 am (local)

C'mon, you have it great. When they burned that Muslim community center in Murfreesboro a few days ago, they were careful in that it hadn't even been built yet, so the fire only destroyed construction equipment and supplies! Yay!

Of course, let's be clear, that was your fault. You raised a stink. What else could they do but light a match.

Edited at 2010-09-16 08:22 am (local)

From: mumbly_joe 2010-09-16 08:24 am (local)

Well, come on- they should have known that trying to build a non-church in central Tennesse would get that kind of response. Trying to build a place of worship in their own community was a Deliberate Provocation, because they couldn't have not known that Tennessee is full of bigots. And yet, they continue to live there.

Wow, this sort of logic works for anyplace!

From: (Anonymous) 2010-09-16 08:03 am (local)

There's 1.5 billion Muslims in the world.

Simple math tells me that if even 1/2 of 1% of them were looking to take us over, that would be 7 million soldiers -- they would outnumber the American military by a considerable margin; in fact, they'd outnumber all the other soldiers in the whole world. But of course we don't see anything even vaguely close to that.
Ergo, Muslims are more than 99 44/100 % just regular people going about their lives, not looking to cause anybody else any problems at all.

I should also point out that Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Senegal and Bangladesh are Muslim nations that have elected women heads of state. Odd how we haven't, huh?

Maybe you should stop thinking that Al'Qaeda and the Taliban are somehow representative of Islam; I'm sure you don't want me to assert that Timothy McVeigh and Fred Phelps are proof of *your* faith's beliefs.

Given the response this post has generated here and elsewhere, are you planning to do a follow-up?

I think the most objective and unemotional way I can respond to this is to say that while I can see that you find a parallel between the recent behavior of the Republican party, specifically the Bushes, and your understanding of the Muslim community in the United States--that in your opinion each is refusing to be a part of things in this country and asking for special treatment--I don't see it at all, very few people will or should, and even if everything you said about immigrants and Muslims is true (it isn't), it wouldn't be the same thing by a very long shot. Immigrants and religious minorities are not insular because of a misplaced victim complex based on not living up to the very ideals they claim to represent, which I understand as your criticism of the Bushes and one that is on target in that context. It's very cogent to say that the Bushes have in no way lived up to the ideals of the founding fathers (although it's not at all clear in itself that the founding fathers did). They don't have the right to wrap themselves in the flag. If you're saying that religious minorities don't have the right to wrap themselves in the flag on the basis of diversity if they don't assimilate, I believe you're very wrong, but even before we get the car that far out of the garage, it's really inappropriate to compare people who have been here a few years and find it a very difficult and hostile environment with the Bushes.

I don't want to attack you personally about this because enough people have done so for you to know that this is a very hurtful post. I would like to think you would care enough to turn it over in your mind for a while why it is and consider what the best response is. I
can't tell you that but I think that just as you have said the Bushes are obliged to take on board the burden of responsibility, you are obliged to answer any points you care to in an honest and thoughtful fashion that honors others' feelings without self-consciousness. That's a tall order when one writes an unpopular post but it is a necessity for the community. It is easier than people like to admit to get carried away with the sound of one's own voice when addressing a painful and controversial issue, and imagine one is acting as a model for others, and create much more heat than light with one's own seeming brilliance. If it happens it's better to sort out the confusion one has created and address the criticisms directly, in a listening way, rather than try to write or think creatively again. We don't need self-appointed peacemakers here or in other areas marked by a lot of unresolved pain; we do need good citizens. Please be one.

From: exiledv2
2010-09-16 08:44 am (local)

Ms Moon, I will be perfectly frank. I will quote the Rude Pundit: You despise this country if you think the Cordoba Initiative should move its planned community center. You have no understanding of the Constitution. If fact, you are in opposition to it. You have no respect for freedom of religion or speech. You are a coward who believes that the Constitution and the nation are too fucking weak to handle such freedoms. If you're not one of the crass politicians seeking to exploit the simpletons for your gain or a ratings-whore on Fox, you are a vile, hate-filled, unprincipled lump of shit who thinks that rights are only good when convenient for you, and you are too fucking lazy to fight for anything other than your prejudice and hatred. That's easy, motherfucker.

If you truly supported the rights and freedoms of Muslims in the USA, you would not states that they believe "stuff that unfits them for citizenship". Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of thought - and that means freedom in all respects, not just in ones that we approve of.

From: stranger_here
2010-09-16 09:00 am (local)

I believe I understand where you're coming from. It's the position already-assimilated Americans have taken every time a new wave of immigrants arrived, and the charges leveled at each group have been similar. There is always some unexamined ethnic-stereotype panic behind it, but it also arises from a sincere concern that the new group will screw up the good thing this country has going, that the group doesn't blend well with the American Way, that the group is innately anti-American, that the group will be irresponsible moochers, that the group will damage the fabric of society by holding on to some of its own culture instead of assimilating into the prevailing one.
These are understandable concerns, but -- as our country's history has proven -- they are also full of shit, and should not be catered to as they tend to bring out the worst in human nature. Regardless: all of that is largely irrelevant in the case of Park51/Cordoba House, where the people you're talking about are not a new wave of immigrants, but a wide variety of people who are mostly Americans, just like you -- and New Yorkers, unlike you. So how does a New York community center fall into the category of something the rest of the nation needs to approve? The only demand being made upon anyone is that we continue to do the work this country requires from all of us as citizens: to hold true to the *e pluribus unum* ideal, and not allow ourselves to fall into divisive bigotry.

When I read a post like this, I am deeply disturbed by the "us vs. them" mentality that comes through. Your depiction of "them" is insulting, condescending, and wildly simplistic. And who is this "us", exactly? As a Jew, I get nervous when Christians start accusing other religious groups of not fitting in well enough. I cannot hear the things being said now against Muslims without hearing echoes of the same prejudice and hostility that's been aimed against me and mine throughout history. They're the same kinds of things that get said against every group who is seen to exist outside of a dominant culture. One can argue the circumstances are different, and you are free to hold your own opinions (informed or un-) about someone else's religious or cultural beliefs, but none of that matters when it comes down to how you decide you're going to treat your fellow citizens and their right to gather and worship and do their own thing. The "them" you are talking about are my friends, my people, our people, our country. Us. We're all here together. We find our way to common ground by defining it to include our differences.

"These are understandable concerns, but -- as our country's history has proven -- they are also full of shit, and should not be catered to as they tend to bring out the worst in human nature."

A very nice way of putting a very big amount of what needs to be said, here as elsewhere. Thanks.
I do not dispute that there are moderate, even liberal, Muslims, that many Muslims have all the virtues of civilized persons and are admirable in all those ways.

Wow, they are practically people! That bathe and show restraint in the eating of babies! They may even have indoor plumbing! Hurrah!

If you think I am taking your comment "out of context" I have to tell you that there is no context in which that statement is not dripping in contempt.

When a writer with a diverse readership decided to post a piece complaining about Muslims and the community center in NYC, she should have been able to predict that this would upset a lot of people... It is hard to believe that she did not know that--did not anticipate it--and was not, in a way, probing to see if she could start a controversy. If she did not know, then she did not know enough about the audience to which she speaks. Though I am not angry about it, and have not spoken out in opposition, I do think it was a rude and tactless thing to do.

Others have already spoken very eloquently on this subject, so I'll be frank: this is the stupidest post I've read in a while.

Your entire rhetoric reminds me of "but if black people have a party with no whites invited, it's reverse racism!" arguments. "I'm so open-minded, but those Muslims I keep bending over backwards for just won't show their appreciation for my tolerating them by abandoning their uncivilised beliefs!"

To which I say, bullshit.
I do not dispute that there are moderate, even liberal, Muslims, that many Muslims have all the virtues of civilized persons and are admirable in all those ways. Why, shukran. So glad to know some of us are sort-of OK by your lights, damned by your faint praise.

This probably comes as a shock to you, but there have been Muslims in this country since at least the 17th century. An estimated 10-20% of slaves brought to this country were Muslim; many were able to maintain their beliefs despite it all. US-born blacks still comprise a sizable chunk of the Muslim population in this country, and for many it's not recent reversion, either (and no, I am NOT talking about the NOI).

So in all this talk about assimilation, and how "they" need to get with the program when "they" come over here...and bigolly, that means Muslims, you are quite clear on that...how 'bout all those whose families have BEEN here, probably longer than yours, Miz Moon? None of my direct forebears immigrated any later than the early 19th century.

So in all your puffed-up xenophobic nativist fail, there's this *secondary* strain of bigotry to consider, which sort of lays bare the undercurrents of it all. The only thing I can conclude is that anyone with a little brown to their skin...isn't automatically included in your exceedingly-myopic vision of "America." Typical racist fail, on top of the exceedingly-misinformed (and intentionally misleading) anti-Muslim hysteria.

You definitely made one thing clear to me. I should never read your books or go to a conference where you will be the speaker. See comments above for explanations of the duplicity of your language, and that's not the kind of thing I want to be exposed to.

An observation about noses, faces, and the cutting off of same...

or go to a conference where you will be the speaker

Knowing that the original poster is scheduled to be a Guest of Honor at WisCon* next year, I think that doing this would be cutting off your nose to spite your face; I do not expect her to get an easy ride at WisCon, and judging an entire convention/conference by one person will only result in reducing your chances of future enjoyment. ;)

(That said, if the original poster appeared on a bill with, say, Mr. Card, I'd be much more
inclined to go "Oh, not on your life am I going there").

*ObInvolvementDisclaimer: I've been a member of the WisCon community for many years, and love the convention dearly -- the only thing that could keep me away is the logistics and finances of twins. ;)

From: mamculuna
2010-09-16 11:25 am (local)
Re: An observation about noses, faces, and the cutting off of same...

Maybe I should not have ruled out the whole conference, but as keynote speaker, she takes on a certain amount of representation of the whole event, whether she should or not.

But it is easy for me to say--Wiscon is hard for me to get to, in spite of much longing.

From: redbird
2010-09-16 09:56 am (local)

There are large numbers of Protestant Christians who want to replace the U.S. government with a theocracy. I see no move to strip away their citizenship.

There are Christians in this country who want me dead, just because of who I choose to love. We don't deem Christians as a group unfit for citizenship because some of them not only hold these hateful and anti-social beliefs, but act on them. When Matthew Shepard was murdered, nobody said "See, look how dangerous Christians are."

From: sunhawk
2010-09-16 10:16 am (local)

Others have said what I would say in response to this article far better than I could ever hope to imagine so I will move on to say that I really hope you don't just ignore the anger and hurt your words have caused and make a follow up post to address how you poorly expressed yourself. I find it disappointing that a professional author would see all these negative reactions to her words and conclude that the fault must lie with the reader instead of contemplating that the fault lies with the writer for not communicating their thoughts in a clear format. Also, I would think an author might pass such political posts past some sort of "editor" before posting, at the very least if you'd shown this to even one Muslim reader, you could have avoided this whole mess. This is of course giving you the
benefit of the doubt that you are not in fact such a raging Islamophobe, which you have yet to prove. It's kinda hard to believe that you don't believe the bigotry you espoused in this entry, it really goes beyond simple mispeaking, but showcases deep-set opinions about race and religion that promoted your post at all.

From: tacky_tramp
2010-09-16 12:55 pm (local)

I really don't think she expressed herself poorly. I think she told us exactly what she thinks about Muslims and Muslim-Americans.

From: like_a_swallow
2010-09-16 10:19 am (local)

US politics seems so incredibly screwed. But now it's all just idiots shouting at each other. Which is a real shame because it was once a kind of beacon to the rest of us, :(.

From: dogemperor
2010-09-16 10:25 am (local)

WARNING: ANGRY NDN RANT ENSUES

In regards to "assimilation":

I expect that you shall shortly be studying Comanche First Nation culture and language, seeing as you *are* technically living in the area in which they are the traditional landowners thereof...

...that is, if you'd not forced them off their land which they had first instead of insisting they move or "assimilate".

Just like you did with my ancestors, who were there *first* in North Carolina and Georgia and ACTUALLY DID TRY TO ASSIMILATE…and actually DID have a nice Supreme Court precedent that is STILL used as a basis of law regarding First Nations in the US declaring us SOVEREIGN, despite Andy Jackson wanting us to vacate the premises so a bunch of immigrant squatters could go gold-mining.

What did all our assimilation and culture (to the point of inventing our own writing system, even, and having an established literature) and our Supreme Court precedent get
my ancestors?

A lovely little death-march in the middle of winter where one fourth of them died. The invaders even have deigned to do a little National Historic Trail to acknowledge this. A number of my own ancestors died on it--including a number who assimilated into Western culture completely to the point of interracial marriages.

They even got to stay in little camps where they were concentrated en masse so they could be forcibly marched to Oklahoma (and caught dysentery and typhoid and all SORTS of fun, fatal diseases).

Incidentally--the US Government has still not formally apologised for this bit of oversight.

Oh, and those who were lucky enough NOT to be deported to Oklahoma or to a rez in North Carolina (that the US government persistently invaded to 1879, thank you very much, trying to deport its owners to Oklahoma)...they ended up as stateless persons who were literally *ineligible* for citizenship; ironically enough, they used the same court decision ruling my ancestors' First Nation was sovereign in ruling that all First Nations peoples were automatically and permanently ineligible for US citizenship and could be deported to Bumfuck, Oklahoma anytime at the US Army's leisure.

This didn't get corrected until 1924--legally, my ancestors COULDN'T assimilate and tended to pretend they were "Black Irish" and "Black Dutch"--yeah, there was the chance of lynchings and all, but you'd not be stripped of literally everything you owned and marched from your home to Oklahoma to live on some bit of land that even cattle ranchers had refused.

Yes, you're reading this right. My grandfather, who was born in 1920, was technically an illegal alien in his own country, where his ancestors had lived for the past fourteen thousand fucking years and had no legal way of acquiring US citizenship even though he'd lived in American, Western culture all his life and all his ancestors had as well since the early 1800s.

My great-grandmother lived as an illegal alien till she was in her twenties. She, like my grandfather, got US citizenship through an act of Congress that mass-nationalised First Nations peoples--were it not for that, I'd be an OMFG ILLEGAL ALIEN OH NOES!
despite the fact I've lived here, and my ancestors have lived in this state, since time immemorial.

All of my ancestors before then, up to the ancestor I had who survived the Oklahoma Death March now euphemistically referred to as the Trail of Tears (who survived because he was handed off to a biracial Cherokee/white family as an infant), were all illegal aliens in their own country--because they didn't get deported to Oklahoma, couldn't obtain legal US citizenship, had to "pass" as being "black Dutch" or "black Irish", had assimilated to the point that nobody in my family has probably spoken Cherokee in over 150 years (and it's just us young-uns who are getting even SOME of the traditions back) but still were considered aliens in their own country.

Fat fucking lot of good that whole "Assimilate and people will ACCEPT you!" thing did with my ancestors...guess that doesn't count if you're indigenous, eh?

Oh, yeah, and yes, I DID mean "stateless". You couldn't get on the rolls unless you took the Dawes Act settlements (which is how the US determines who is, or is not, an "American Indian" as far as things like BIA benefits go). If you did take the Dawes Act settlement, you could be deported immediately to the rez. My folks never took the settlements, and in fact kept on the "down-low" about our Cherokee ancestry up to the point the rolls were officially closed; if it weren't for the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, me and my entire maternal side of the family would be stateless persons (as First Nations people and folks with First Nations ancestry were ineligible for citizenship, all of the federally recognised Cherokee Nations (there are three) closed their rolls, and hence there would be no way for me or my ancestors to be nationalised either as US citizens or citizens of one of the three Cherokee Nations--the latter of which would likely NOT be recognised by most countries, as even Iroquois Confederacy passports aren't widely recognised).

If it weren't for that law that mass-nationalised my grandpa and my great-grandma, I'd be having to carry around one of these--the old term for them is "Nansen passport"--it's basically a UN passport-substitute stating you are a stateless person. So would a metric shitload of people, particularly in the Southeast and Southwest US.

So kindly go pound sand about that whole "Assimilate and make an effort and you'll be accepted as Real Americans (tm)!" bullshit. Didn't work for my ancestors, unfortunately--in fact, the government made it IMPOSSIBLE for a good hundred years.

Kind of like what a lot of dominionists and teabaggers want to do with Moslem people now, even those who've assimilated.
I don't know you, but I dig this rant.

I also find it fascinating that people who harken back to a nostalgic era of assimilation and citizenship in the US generally manage to ignore the legacy of cultural and community damage done by the residential indian schools system, as well as the circumstances that led to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

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Yeeep. What the OP and those like her pretend not to know is that it's only those deemed "white enough" who have ever been allowed to assimilate (o irony, that she even alludes in the post to the fact that Italians are now considered white enough where they once weren't). Everyone else had to try to aspire to the arbitrary dominant "standard" they couldn't possibly meet; i.e., try to be as inoffensive and nonthreateningly different as possible. Never worked real well.
Someone who is not willing to stand by her fellow-citizens' First Amendment right to freedom of worship has no grounds to lecture anyone about good citizenship.

It's weird that you express horror over burning copies of the Koran (a symbolic act that, however hateful and stupid, abridges no one's rights) and yet you think it is "rude and tactless" for Americans to exercise their rights where they live and work. It suggests that symbol trumps substance in your thinking.

To be a good citizen in this country is to love other people's freedom as much as your own. Do you meet that test?

From: caerwynx
2010-09-16 11:22 am (local)
Re: It pains me to say this...

Well said. Well said, indeed.

From: emily_goddess
2010-09-16 11:34 am (local)
Re: It pains me to say this...

Someone who is not willing to stand by her fellow-citizens' First Amendment right to freedom of worship has no grounds to lecture anyone about good citizenship.

We have a winner!

From: elyne
2010-09-16 11:40 am (local)

I think it's very telling that there hasn't been a response from the OP in quite a while, and that she hasn't made any mention of it in her public LJ posts since - especially after it's garnered so much attention and so many comments. One can draw one's own conclusions from her absence of replies, especially to the many thoughtful and well-writen comments that people have taken time and effort to write. Perhaps she is hoping that this little teapot tempest she's stirred up will blow over.

If that is the case, I suspect she's doomed to dissapointment. Statements like this tend to stick in people's memories...
Elizabeth,

I didn't read this post when it popped up on my friend page and just skimmed the opening, so I was taken by surprise when I saw other people posting about it. When I read it, I was horrified because what you say does not match the person I thought I knew. The post begins and thought I didn't agree with everything, I nodded at many of the comments about how people often don't think of the larger community.

My feelings changed when I got to the paragraph, "Which brings me, on this particular day, to the aftermaths of 9/11. And, in line with that, the vexed question of the Islamic memorial site and the responsibilities of immigrant citizens in general."

I initially winced at the use of "Islamic memorial site" since it is an inaccurate description, but thought that you might be using it ironically. In fact, I expected, based on what I had read previously, for you to talk about how citizens who protested the site were failing to support some of the founding principals of the United States.

The succeeding paragraphs had me pushing back in my chair, away from the computer. I have read your comments that people's interpretation of your words as bigoted means that they didn't read what you wrote. One of the many problems for me is that I have always been impressed with your command of the language. I have difficulty believing that you did not write what you intended to say.

The fact that so many people are interpreting the words you have chosen to use as bigotted speech is painful, I am sure, but their experience also reflects how I interpreted what I read. As with any writing, I can only go by the words you wrote, not the ideas in your head. Even having read other things of yours which are well-reasoned and speak out for human dignity, even with trying to read your post with the best possible lens, I cannot escape the implicit problems in it.

Other posters have already broken down the whys of the problematic language, and done so better than I, so I am going to confine myself to asking you to re-examine what you wrote in the light of the responses here.
From: thessalian 2010-09-16 12:06 pm (local)

When I first read about this blog posting, I was hoping that there was some kind of lack of context. Having read this in its entirety, the only thing I can really add to what's being said is this: the hypocrisy and doublethink in this particular post is blatant, crass and ill-considered. You state that citizenship is all about making sacrifices for the good of the citizenry as a whole, yet you seem to suggest that the only people who should be giving ground are those whose faith, cultural heritage and/or lifestyle run in any way differently to 'the norm'. Since the status quo is a very difficult thing to quantify, this comes across as you stating that anyone who is not acting in a way that you personally consider appropriate for a citizen should either give up everything that makes them who they are or be in some way grateful that people are tolerating them. All this in the name of a nation whose founding principles actually flag up the equality of all people. This does not strike me as a recipe for 'good citizenship'. Is 'live and let live' so difficult that anything more than grudging tolerance is considered damaging to an entire nation?

That said, I don't agree with what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it. It just saddens me that there are people who are oblivious and blinkered enough that they can actually say things like 'many Muslims have all the virtues of civilized persons' and damn an entire faith with faint praise like 'I do not dispute that there are moderate, even liberal, Muslims', as if these 'moderate, liberal Muslims' are in the minority when compared to 'the terrorists'.

From: midnightstation 2010-09-16 12:36 pm (local)

WOW! I have no idea what country you live in. In my country I live in a "Melting Pot". Remember that word? I didn't think so.

I agree about people needing to fit in. We need to fit in to the Native American culture that was here before the Europeans came and stole the land from the Native American Indians. Se need to not push our culture on theirs. Ooops. Too late.

I think you need to look inward and realize your white privilege is screaming in your post.

-S
"I feel that I personally (and many others) lean over backwards to put up with these things, to let Muslims believe..."

I'm appalled. I love your writing, and I usually enjoy the expressions of those in the writing community, which is why I'm here. But to believe for EVEN ONE SECOND that it is YOUR right to dictate what Muslims are allowed to believe is....~shudder~

This sort of discrimination is unseemly and offensive. Your Privelege is so blatant here I am ashamed to follow your journal any longer. The first half of this post regarding the duties of a citizen I was nodding along, but as soon as you go to your apparent point about Muslim Americans it began almost immediately to sound very much like 'I know rape is wrong, but she should have known better than to walk there/dress like that'

I won't be following you anymore, and I hope someone manages to educate you as to how absolutely horrifying it is of you to say this, in any space, much less a semi-public forum.