

Opinion

GILBERT HETHERWICK: A view on politics and fear

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Fear has always been a very powerful and destructive social political tool. In the 1968 election Nixon's famous "southern strategy" was to not worry about the registration of black voters as he was sure that the FEAR of blacks voting would drive whites in much larger numbers to the polls to vote Republican. And it worked.

And from Bush's nuclear imagery pulling us into Iraq, to Sarah Palin's comments about Obama "palling around with terrorists", Republicans have been using fear as a tactic ever since. And now Newt Gingrich has risen from his political grave with his own "fears" of Sharia law replacing our constitution. Gingrich also made the comment that we should not allow any mosques to be built in America until Saudi Arabia allows churches. So he believes we should lower ourselves to their standards rather than maintaining our model of democracy for the rest of the world. Immediately following the 911 attacks President Bush was terrific in his appeals to Americans that the attacks were NOT by the Muslim faith but rather by a very small extremist group. Similar to the Christian extremist who recently bombed a mosque in Florida during prayer services. Can you imagine the coverage if a Muslim had bombed a Floridian Christian church? Fox would have gone 24-7 for weeks!

So why the fear? And why the fear NOW? Because we supposedly have a Muslim in the White House! During the 2008 election a USA Today poll revealed that one in five Americans (wrongly) believe Obama to be Muslim. And Rove knows that this core of fear is a very strong base from which to build. And from the tea baggers to Mr. Gingrich they are pumping up the rhetoric for what they hope will be a Republican sweep in the mid-term elections. Fear worked for Nixon and it certainly worked for Bush and Cheney. And it will work again. Which brings us to the "mosque" being built on "sacred ground" AT ground zero.

But it ISN'T at ground zero, ISN'T a mosque, and this "sacred ground" also features strip clubs, adult bookstores and a small mosque opened BEFORE the trade center was built. And the "radical Muslim" Imam behind the project now turns out to have actually worked with the FBI on counter terrorism issues.

But with polls showing that a large majority of Americans are against the building of the Muslim community center the Republicans know they have a perfect springboard to raise fears to the next level. And this is from the same party that recently voted DOWN financial aid to the 911 police and firemen for their 911 derived injuries. It is a shameful exploitation of tragedy for political gain.

The Mayor and the Borough President are perhaps the only two politicians who should be concerned about the development of private property in this still blighted neighborhood. And they both have publicly supported the building of the center.

This positioning of Islam as the enemy, rather than the fringe group of extremists who are, is a very dangerous game. It makes you long for the wisdom and guidance of President Bush.

When we learned there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq the premise became that it was good that we went to war as it freed the Iraqi people from the repressive regime of Hussein. Which means that over 4,000 Americans have died to support freedom for Muslims in their homeland.

And now we want to restrict their freedoms here in the United States?

Home of the FREE AND THE BRAVE? Painfully ironic.

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