Modern-day witch hunts
Broadly targeting the Muslim community is antithetical to America’s founding ideals
By Jamie Dailey | Nov 12

Salem in 1692 was a dark place. Witchcraft was the talk of the town and accusations were rampant. The situation in Salem unraveled into a frenzy, with villagers fearing the devil was recruiting followers in their town, followers that would bring down the church. This hysteria caused the hanging of 19 villagers, the pressing of one of them to death and potentially the deaths of 13 in prison. Yet, it turns out there was no witchcraft in Salem after all. Soon after the last execution, Massachusetts’ governor dissolved the prosecuting court and pardoned its prisoners. Irrational fear and paranoia caused the deaths of those in Salem; the Salem trials are a perfect example of what irrational fear can do to a community. Just as irrational fear of witchcraft in 1692 led to the execution of Salem villagers, irrational fear of terrorism in 2010 is leading to the persecution of American Muslims.

The persecution of Muslim Americans takes many forms, but one that has garnered a considerable amount of attention lately involves the Ground Zero Mosque in New York City. The name ”Ground Zero Mosque” is misleading, as the mosque is not on Ground Zero, but rather located two blocks away - one of many buildings within the dense area of lower Manhattan. Opponents of the mosque claim that its proximity to the former site of the World Trade Center would offend the families of those who died on 9/11. Yet those who attack the existence of the mosque are in effect attacking the very right that all religions have, including Islam, to free worship in this country.

The high-profile controversy about the Ground Zero Mosque only scratches the surface when it comes to attacks on Islamic places of worship. In August alone, heinous attacks were reported against mosques in three different states: Arizona, Connecticut and California. And these are only a sampling of the total attacks in 2010. In Glendale, Arizona, a bottle filled with acid was thrown at a mosque while mosque officials stood nearby. In Bridgeport, Connecticut, protestors picketed a mosque celebrating Ramadan and shouted slurs. In Madera, California, a brick was thrown at a mosque and signs were left reading, ”Wake up America, the enemy is here” and ”No temple for the god of terrorism.”

These attacks on mosques are incredibly disturbing and the belief that the Ground Zero Mosque would offend victims’ families brings up the very serious question of who really attacked the United States on 9/11—al Qaeda or Islam? Al Qaeda, an Islamic terrorist organization, attacked the United States on 9/11 - not an entire religion. Recall that a number of Muslims also lost their lives with the
fall of the towers. While this is not a competition of numbers, it is a testament to the fact that the victims of Islamic terrorist organizations include Americans who happen to be Muslim.

Furthermore, every religion has extremists and terrorists, including Christianity. The Army of God is a Christian terrorist organization that uses violence as a means to end the practice of abortion. In 1984, they were responsible for a string of bombings at abortion clinics and members have murdered doctors who give abortions to patients. One member, Clayton Waagner, sent more than 500 threatening letters to abortion clinics and pro-abortion organizations containing a white powdery substance in 2001. Another Christian terrorist organization is Hutaree, whose members were arrested earlier this year for plotting to kill members of law enforcement. In this horrific plot, members planned to kill one law enforcement officer and use the officer’s funeral to kill many more officers who would have assembled to honor their co-worker.

More important, however, is the fact that Muslims have a right to their religion. They have a right to worship in this country. They have a right to the safe, secure and free practice of their religion. They have a right to celebrate holidays, like Ramadan, without having slurs lodged against them. They should feel safe in their mosques and outside them and should not go to worship only to find their places of worship vandalized and desecrated. The First Amendment guarantees the right to religious freedom and states that, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Religious freedom and religious toleration are two of the most important foundational ideas of our nation.

Just as leaders in Salem finally called an end to the absurd witch hunt that killed many who had nothing to do with the devil, Americans should take a stand against this new witch hunt targeting Muslims who have nothing to do with terrorism. Irrational fear is threatening to tear apart the fabric of religious toleration and freedom in this country. Such a threat is too costly and too devastating to ignore.

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