

Fashionable Racism

by Greg Westfall

"In a letter released Thursday by [Donald] Trump's publicist, the real estate investor told Elzanaty that he would buy his stake in the lower Manhattan building for 25 percent more than whatever Elzanaty paid. ... Trump also attached a condition to his offer. He said that as part of the deal, the backers of the project would need to promise that any new mosque they build would be at least five block farther from the World Trade Center site."

*"Trump's offer to ground zero investor is rejected,"
Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Sept. 10, 2010 at 8A.*

For those of you who don't know, Hisham Elzanaty is a major investor in the group that owns the site upon which the "Ground Zero Mosque" is slated to be built. He turned Trump's magnanimous offer down.

But what about the fact that it was made to begin with? What message did Trump convey? What message did he *want* to convey? Regardless of how he feels, one would think that Donald Trump is mindful of his public image. Aside from being a billionaire, he has had a successful TV show, written books and starred in commercials. He has a publicist. Surely he must know that looking like a complete racist could be bad for business. Of course he does. The question is whether his actions here make him look like one.

There would seem to be some evidence that they should. After all, we've seen the type of "condition" that Trump proposed here before. Here are some examples:

The parties hereto ... hereby mutually covenant, promise and agree each with the others, and for their respective heirs and assigns, that no part of said lands owned by them as described following their signatures to this instrument, shall ever be used, occupied by or sold, conveyed, leased, rented or given to Negroes, or any person or persons of the Negro blood.

No part of said property hereby conveyed shall ever be used or occupied by any Hebrew or by any person of the Ethiopian, Malay or any Asiatic Race, excepting only employees in the domestic service on the premises of persons qualified hereunder as occupants and users and residing on the premises.

No persons of any race other than the white race shall use or occupy any building or any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race domiciled with an owner or tenant.¹

Had his offer been accepted, the restrictive covenant in this case might have looked something like this:

The parties hereto signing and executing this instrument hereby mutually covenant, promise and agree each with the others, and for their respective heirs and assigns, that no part of said property shall ever be used as a house of worship connected with the religion of Islam or as a place designed primarily as a place for Muslims to congregate.

Do you suppose that Trump thought of it like this?

And if so, then what?

What was *your* reaction to the suggestion that this was a racist act? Did you see a similarity between the Jim Crow restrictive covenants and the situation with the mosque? Or, rather, was your first thought that they are very different situations and that my comparison is a little simplistic?

If you said I was being a little simplistic, you would be in good company:



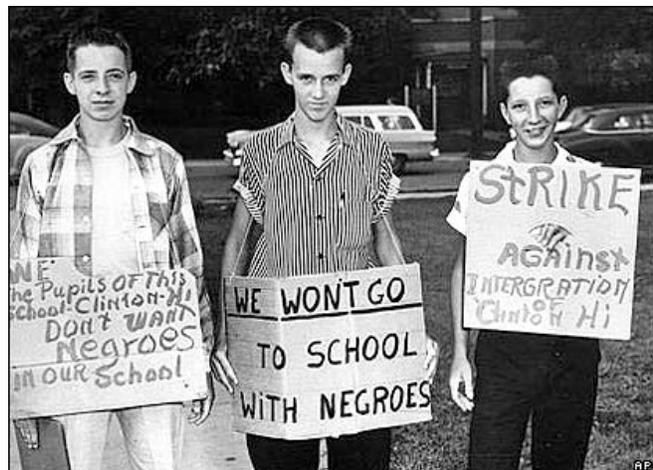
(AP) Former Mayor Rudy Giuliani on Thursday joined a growing number of politicians supporting a move of a proposed Islamic center and mosque near ground zero to state-owned land farther from the Sept. 11 attack site. Giuliani, who led New Yorkers through Sept. 11 and its aftermath and whose opinion on the mosque could carry considerable clout, made his comments as the imam leading plans for the community center toured the Middle East promoting religious tolerance. "If you are a healer, you do not go forward with this project," Giuliani said on NBC's "Today" show, referring to the center's leader, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf. "If you are a warrior, you do."¹²

To those who share this belief, that position seems eminently reasonable. After all, 3,000 people died on 9/11 and we are just talking about moving the mosque a few blocks. That's a good compromise, right? They would argue that something like this (allowing Muslim institutions

within the "hallowed ground" of the World Trade Center site) needs to be taken very slowly. Of course, those who benefit from a system of apartheid always advocate a "go slow" approach. Usually right after the "go nowhere" approach has finally failed.

The Rudy Giulianis of the world - the ones whose "hearts are in the right place and just want everyone to get along" - cast this whole mosque thing as a "complicated issue." Well, it would seem the complexity of the issue is directly related to which side of the issue one is on. I would imagine that in 1963, whether segregation was morally right was a very complicated issue indeed. That is, if you were a white person living in the South. The Rudy Giuliani-type wants to be a good guy - he wants to help figure this whole thing out. He wants to make peace. He just wants to do it by getting the Muslims to go somewhere else.

Of course, not everyone is a Rudy Giuliani. There are those like former senator Rick Lazio, who was running for New York Governor, and former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, who have taken on a more strident tone to convey a much simpler message -- Muslims are downright evil.³ These are the George Wallaces of today, proudly declaring "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!"⁴ They don't pretend to make peace or play nice. Gingrich comes right out and calls them Nazis.



Are they all out of their minds? No, just the opposite. You see, in 1963, the majority of people in the South didn't want the races to mingle. George Wallace knew that. Today the majority of New Yorkers supposedly don't want the "Ground Zero Mosque" to be built. In all likelihood, a majority of Americans feels the same way.

Giuliani, Gingrich and Lazio are all politicians. As such, they either (1) say things they really believe, imagining that there is a large, like-minded audience who will agree with them, or (2) say things they don't really care much about in an attempt to appeal to that same audience. They are also not stupid. Trump's not stupid either. He is very well aware of the implications of his offer, just as these politicians are very well aware of the implications of the statements they are making. They just don't care. They're preaching to the choir. It's racism, yes, but it's highly fashionable racism.

How ironic that Gingrich should compare these Muslims to Nazis. The Third Reich, after all, was the logical extension of fashionable racism. Gingrich is just confused

about who's wearing the brown shirts here. Looking into too many cameras and not enough mirrors will do that to you.

¹ Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants.htm>. These are three separate covenants from three separate deeds.

² "Rudy Giuliani: Move Mosque away from Ground Zero," <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/08/19/politics/main6788663.shtml>.

³ See "*Rick Lazio Labels 'Ground Zero Mosque' Imam Terrorist Sympathizer*," http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20014319-503544.html; "*Letting the Terrorists Win: Newt Gingrich and the 'Ground Zero Mosque'*," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-jw-stickings/letting-the-terrorists-wi_b_707597.html.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Wallace%27s_1963_Inaugural_Address.