

kind of foreign policy is proper for a free and prosperous America? Is it one driven by an unrestrained messianism, the worship of global "democracy," the imposition of Western values at gunpoint throughout the world? Or is it based on the traditional wisdom of the Founding Fathers, who counseled us against "entangling alliances" and warned that hubris, and the quest for empire, would be the downfall of our old republic?

As now constituted, the antiwar movement is not prepared to win this debate. The only component that can deal with the question of imperialism is hopelessly saddled with all sorts of rather unattractive baggage, and is so self-infatuated that it can barely look further right than the Rev. Al Sharpton.

A few principled leftists realize that they need to broaden the appeal of the movement to oppose the war and that the only reliable allies they can hope for come from the anti-interventionist Right: "If the left can ever reach out to this [populist, antiwar] right," writes *Nation* columnist Alexander Cockburn, "which it's almost constitutionally incapable of doing, we'll have something." The lessening of ANSWER's influence, however, will not necessarily lead to this kind of *glasnost*. An alliance of Pat Buchanan with the Hollywood Left seems even more improbable.

Yet a Left-Right alliance of viscerally antiwar liberals and nationalist "America First" conservatives will naturally evolve over time as the horrible consequences of this war come home to roost: they will find themselves moving ineluctably toward one another, in program if not in spirit. The only problem is that, by that time, it will be too late.

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CAIR Package

A Muslim civil rights group tests the limits of American pluralism.

By Jeremy Lott

IF AN EDITORIAL CARTOONIST'S job is to provoke, then Doug Marlette hit the jackpot with an illustration entitled "What would Muhammad drive?" Taking its cue from the popular "What would Jesus drive?" campaign—a question proposed by Protestant environmentalists to shame commuters out of driving SUVs—the cartoon featured the founder of Islam behind the wheel of a Ryder rental truck *à la* Tim McVeigh) that carried a nuclear bomb. Marlette justified this cartoon to WorldNetDaily.com by explaining, "The truth, like it or not, is that Muslim fundamentalists have committed devastating acts of terrorism against our country in the name of their prophet."

The drawing was submitted to the *Tallahassee Democrat*, which declined to run it in the print edition. But the cartoon of a bomb-toting Muhammad was accidentally posted online and quickly made the rounds via e-mail, which provoked a strong reaction from Muslims.

Marlette received over 4,500 angry e-mails and a torrential downpour of phone calls, including some that he characterized as death threats. Columnist Kathleen Parker complained that Marlette was "on the receiving end of an Islamist *fatwa*," which was organized by the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR—pronounced "care").

Founded in 1994 by Omar Ahmad and convert Ibrahim Hooper as a civil rights group to "promote a positive image of

Islam and Muslims in America," the Washington D.C.-based CAIR went relatively unnoticed until four hijacked planes slammed into the World Trade Center and Pentagon and plowed into a Pennsylvania field. (A search of U.S. newspapers for the year previous to the attacks yields 607 mentions. In the month after the attacks, CAIR received notice 417 times)

Since Sept. 11, 2001, CAIR has been the most effective voice for the interests of American Muslims, whether they want to be spoken for or not. President Bush early on met publicly with CAIR members as part of his campaign to declare Islam a "religion of peace." CAIR has got this attention not by holding symposia or calling for papers but by raising a ruckus about a thousand slights, real or perceived, against Islam in general and American Muslims in particular. The operation involves mass media appearances and grassroots activism, but by far the most effective is the so-called CAIR Package.

Every day—sometimes several times a day—CAIR sends out updates to several hundred thousand readers who have signed up to receive them at the CAIR website (www.cair-net.org). As the website coyly explains, "We believe local response is a key factor in making our voices heard." The subject matter ranges from cloning to anti-Islamic gaffes by journalists, politicians, or other public figures. The items include con-

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tact info as well as a suggested, peaceful course of action. Often, the recommendation is as simple as asking members to protest against criticism of Muslims or Islam, which tends to produce instant migraines for reporters, columnists, or newspaper ombudsmen.

Many members of the press, understandably, do not look kindly on the thousands of e-mails that a CAIR alert can generate. WorldNetDaily founder Joseph Farah complains, "Our coverage of the group has ... sparked thousands of protest e-mails from its followers—not only in the United States but the entire Muslim world." Echoing a criticism that has found a home in outlets from the *New Republic* to the *Weekly Standard* to *Salon*, Farah calls CAIR "an extremist organization posing as a reasonable, moderate group." A lefty editor who requested not to be named called the group "dishonest, and sometimes rather extremist." CAIR has been accused of sloppiness, of refusing to denounce violence, and of having ties to some shady characters. Its detractors paint a picture of an Islamofascist cabal masquerading as a civil rights group.

Some of the criticism directed at CAIR is to the point, but much of it is fraught with mistakes and hyperbole. To wit, last March 17, *National Review's* Rod Dreher posted an item on his magazine's online forum ("The Corner") pointing to a recent grenade attack on a Protestant church in Pakistan, which killed five and injured 45 others. Dreher wrote, "We await CAIR's e-mail campaign denouncing this violence." But several hours previous to Dreher's post, a message had already been sent to the CAIR e-mail list that quoted CAIR chairman Omar Ahmad as saying, "We condemn this attack in the strongest terms possible and call for the apprehension of the perpetrators. It is not only an act of terrorism against innocent civilians,

but is also an assault on the sanctity of a house of worship. No political or religious cause could justify such horrifying violence." It is hard to see how CAIR's condemnation could have got any stronger than the "strongest terms possible," but a correction was never posted by Dreher.

On the subject of CAIR packages, I speak from experience. I was on the receiving end of one last March over an article for the website of the *American Prospect* that drew attention to comments by editor Rich Lowry in *National Review's* online forum. Lowry had asked readers what should be done in the event of a nuclear attack on U.S. soil. In response to the crazy responses he received, he toyed with the idea that the U.S. should announce that it would nuke Mecca—though he included enough weasel words to avoid endorsing the massacre outright.

What was meant to be a humorous rebuttal (favorite line: "Lowry makes Coulter sound like a girl") turned into a mini scandal when CAIR grabbed my piece, along with the original posts, and broadcast them to its members. Over a two week period, I received copies of more than 1,500 protest e-mails that were sent to *National Review*. The gaffe was noted in several places, including the *Washington Post*. Peggy Noonan wrote in her *Wall Street Journal* column that "we should probably not be having chatty conversations about whether or not it would be a good idea to take out Mecca."

In response, *National Review* began posting the more extreme letters, and Lowry sent out a mass e-mail in which he emphatically explained, "I do not favor bombing Mecca." "Islam's holiest site," he wrote "... would never be a valid target." The letter blamed a sinister-sounding "group called CAIR" for "grossly distort[ing]" what he had written through selective quotation.

But while the event served to validate many conservatives' already rather low view of the Muslim advocacy group, the event had the opposite effect on this writer. Though my politics were and remain very different from CAIR's, I came away from the nuking-Mecca incident with a much more positive impression of both the organization and its constituents.

To begin, CAIR did not rush to send out the alert to its readers. The link in my article to the relevant posts on "The Corner" was broken, and it was only through CAIR's queries that I knew to have it fixed. When the alert finally did go out, CAIR cautioned readers to be restrained and polite in their responses to Lowry and company.

It was obvious that to at least half of the writers, English was a second language, but most were articulate enough to register their opposition. They were also startlingly polite, considering the subject matter. The average letter explained why even hinting at nuking Mecca was a call for violence against Islam and a *de facto* call for violence against Muslims. From there, the letter would a) demand to know what such bile was doing in a "respectable publication"; b) call for a public apology and some kind of censure for Lowry; and then c) and, this is the one that got me, the letter writer would typically thank the *National Review* crew for taking the time to consider the complaint. One admirably frank letter explained, "Mecca matters more to us than our own lives." Other replies were almost touching in their simplicity and grace. My favorite was only four lines long, including the salutation: "Dear Sir, I am so disappointed by these comment made. Do they really show how you feel about Islam and Muslims? God bless you with more wisdom. Thank you."

One should avoid painting too rosy a picture of CAIR and its supporters. A very small subset of the letters copied to

me nearly resembled death threats, and one imagines that the really nasty letters are routinely excluded from carbon copy lists. Also, though CAIR dealt from the top of the deck in this instance, it is not always so scrupulous. Last year, it popularized bogus polling data on a major rise in violence against Muslims in America. In fact, the press would do well to treat CAIR's internal polling with a severe and salty skepticism.

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That said, the tactics of CAIR do not differ in any meaningful way from those of the anti-discrimination industry in general, which *Reason* magazine's Tim Cavanaugh recently labeled, "the Hobbesian nightmare in a nonprofit setting." The tactics that have drawn so much criticism when employed by CAIR—frequent alerts to elicit comments and money from supporters; demonizing opponents; slipshod use of polling; a desire to elevate small tiffs into national outrages—were first field-tested by the grievance industry as a whole. When the Anti-Defamation League or the Catholic League engage in the same sorts of tactics, commentators respond with aggressive eye-rolling or charges of irresponsibility. When CAIR uses them, it is said to be notorious, extremist, even anti-American.

One does not need a sensitive olfactory sense to catch a whiff of the double standard here. The thing that seems so objectionable about CAIR is that, well, it's Muslim. And the mode of Islam that it represents is not necessarily the so-called moderate variety. As such, CAIR advocates policies that irk American conservatives and liberals alike.

On domestic affairs, it angers the Right by speaking out against religious and racial profiling, as well as the use of secret evidence in immigration hearings. December crackdowns on Muslim immigrants did not result in mass deportations largely due to the efforts of CAIR and other groups to publicize their supposed mistreatment. Liberals dislike the group for its traditional Muslim social conservatism—a recent action alert

dubbed cloning as anti-Islam and asked readers to encourage a national ban. On the foreign front, CAIR is decidedly pro-Palestinian, which annoys hawks in both camps.

If CAIR had not been around at the outset of the War on Terrorism, then some mischievous Greek deity would have been sorely tempted to invent such a group. Its existence calls into question all kinds of cherished American notions about freedom of religion and pluralism.

Freedom of religion may be extensive in the U.S., but it is far from blind and applies unevenly to different groups. Old Catholic and Protestant denominations can proceed relatively untrammelled—unless, say, they decide to cover up for child molesters—but more recently imported faiths fight against both laws and sometimes stifling social norms in order to gain acceptance for their particular beliefs and practices.

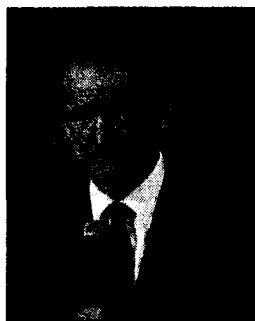
Take the case of Sultaana Freeman, a convert to Islam who filed suit in court last June because the state of Florida denied her a driver's license. The cause of the rejection was not unpaid parking tickets or moving violations, but Mrs. Freeman's attire. Specifically, she wears

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a *niqab* from head to toe and refused to remove the veil for the purpose of taking her picture to place on the license. She had been allowed to pose fully garbed for two previous licenses, but post-Sept. 11 it was no veil or no license.

New York Press columnist Christopher Caldwell was duly incredulous about Freeman's claims. Such a license, he wrote, "is a permit to operate a piece of machinery dangerous enough to cause tens of thousands of deaths a year in this country. The state of Florida has an interest in ensuring that such permits are not transferable. Its insistence on a full facial shot to guarantee nontransferability would seem warranted." Further, Caldwell worried that "Sultaana Freeman with a bag over her head is a dead ringer for—let's take a sometime Florida resident at random here—Mohammed Atta with a bag over his head." CAIR was of a different opinion. Ibrahim Hooper compared the requirement that Freeman remove her *niqab* for the photo to forcing women to remove their blouses—in other words, a gross invasion of privacy.

While I think that Caldwell and company have the better part of this argument, it broaches the interesting question of what constitutes reasonable accommodation of the faith of Muslims. This is a question that CAIR intends to force. It has lent support to Freeman and others who want to sue the government to allow Islamic garb to be worn on the job. CAIR tries to paint its demands in non-sectarian terms—it has even gone so far as to protest the demotion to a desk job of an Illinois Jewish cop, who refused to remove his yarmulke—but it is clear that this active and vocal Muslim presence in the U.S. will probably have to lead to some reassessment of what religious freedom would mean, as extended to Muslims.

In fact, most of the objections to CAIR come down to a simple question: Are Islam and America compatible? Here the name of the organization (to remind, "The Council on American Islamic Relations") is quite appropriate.

In light of Sept. 11 and the many terrorist attacks by fundamentalist Muslims in the year and a half since, the question of the compatibility between Islam and the West is one that many Americans have puzzled on. The U.S. government itself swings this way one day and that on another. President Bush insists that Islam is a "religion of peace" and has resisted calls to have border and airport security use racial or religious profiling, but his government has been particularly hard on Muslim newcomers. Though it may have slipped off the radar screen, several hundred immigrants were arrested not too long after the dust had settled and many of these are still in jail. The Justice Department refuses to list their names, and the courts have agreed to let the proceedings take place in secret—often without the aid of lawyers.

CAIR may be acting out of self-interest when it regularly rails against these secret proceedings, but this may be beside the point. Tim Cavanaugh argues that the group provides a valuable public service by keeping "close track of the war on terrorism's erosion of civil liberties, if only because its constituents are directly impacted." More important is the role that CAIR will play in redrawing the social bargain in the United States, as religious allegiances are balanced against a long-term war on that amorphous beast known as "terrorism." It's a safe bet that pluralism will never be the same again. ■

Jeremy Lott is a staff writer for the Report, a Canadian magazine of news and opinion. He lives in Washington state.

Arts & Letters

FILM

[25th Hour]

The Longest Day

By Steve Sailer

WHAT WOULD YOU DO if your son had one day left before his seven-year prison term began? Or what if he were your oldest buddy? Your boyfriend? Your subordinate who could rat you out to the Feds? What if he were you?

In Spike Lee's "25th Hour," Edward Norton portrays a 31-year-old New Yorker on whom the prison doors are about to slam shut. After weak performances in "Death to Smoochy" and "Red Dragon," the two-time Oscar nominee is back on form.

Norton plays a thoughtful, rather likeable yuppie who has messed up badly, leaving himself with three choices: go on the lam forever, kill himself, or endure an over-crowded maximum-security prison where his boyish WASP looks will likely attract unwanted attention.

There are three basic types of male lead roles. The first is the masculine icon: the enviably but impossibly strong (Arnold Schwarzenegger) or attractive (Tom Cruise) movie star whom every fellow in the audience would like to be.

Norton isn't cut out for that. He pumped himself up to play a massive skinhead in "American History X," but his natural body is wiry and his face resembles an overgrown chipmunk's.

The second kind is the character lead, the interesting personality that the audience enjoys watching but would not

want to be. Norton claims his model is Dustin Hoffman's loveable loser Ratso Rizzo in "Midnight Cowboy."

In "25th Hour," though, Norton delivers a fine version of the third archetype, the easy-to-identify-with regular guy (what Tom Hanks plays). In classic cowboy movies, this would be Jimmy Stewart's part, not John Wayne's masculine icon or Walter Brennan's character roles.

Most men can relate a little to Norton's situation. We have all given some thought to just how we would manage if—God forbid—the time ever came to hop into the proverbial white Bronco and make a break for the border. I hated "Thelma and Louise" when I first saw it because the women botched their escape to Mexico so badly. (They started in Arkansas and fell into the Grand Canyon.) Obviously, they did not have a plan worked out years before, like any red-blooded American man would.

Before our felon makes his final decision, though, there are people he wants to see:

- His heartbroken retired fireman father (Brian Cox, the screenwriting guru in "Adaptation"), an on-the-wagon alcoholic who blames himself for letting his beloved son go wrong;
- His best friend, a brash Wall Street broker (Barry Pepper, Roger Maris in HBO's "61*"), who thinks Norton deserves what he's getting;
- His next closest friend, a pudgy, shy English teacher (the great Philip Seymour Hoffman) paralyzed by a potentially catastrophic crush on his 17-year-old student (Anna Paquin of "The Piano").

Paquin is lively and Hoffman (best known as rock critic Lester Bangs in "Almost Famous") once again disap-

pears into his role. (In good news, Hoffman is rumored to be the first choice to play Ignatius J. Reilly, the quixotic anti-hero of the famous comic novel "A Confederacy of Dunces," which may finally be emerging from 23 years in development hell.)

Then, there is Norton's pampered girlfriend (Rosario Dawson), whom he is not sure he wants to see, since she may have sent him up the river.

Finally, there are the people desperate to see him: a strung-out ex-customer and the scary Brighton Beach gangsters who supplied him heroin. (In his movie debut, 340-pound NFL nose guard Tony Siragusa makes a surprisingly credible Ukrainian enforcer.)

And that is the problem with "25th Hour." Just as Hanks's role as a good-hearted hitman in "Road to Perdition" was misconceived, here the protagonist's crime is too vicious, too sustained, and too vivid to harmonize with Norton's portrayal of an everyman who made a mistake.

The heroin business is not a one-time screw-up. It is a career. Heroin dealers kill their customers by facilitating overdoses and AIDS. And, if the junkies don't pay what they owe, the dealers kill them with guns to encourage the others to pay up. Novelist and screenwriter David Benioff should have assigned Norton's character the Wall Street job, where he could have embezzled millions from abstract victims, while telling himself he was still an OK guy.

This oversight is unfortunate because Benioff's dialogue provides the expert cast with some ferocious scenes. And no one is better at staging harsh arguments between New Yorkers than director Spike Lee.

His visual choices are more questionable, however. Lee imposes a stuttering rhythm on the editing, with lots of gratu-