

Incompatible Islam?

Charles Paul Freund's "2001 Nights" (December) applies a tolerant attitude to a religion and culture that few Americans are well acquainted with. I would point out a few facts that might give Freund additional perspective. He writes of the distinguished and elegant intellect of Edward Said. Just to balance the picture of urbane sophistication, he should know that on a recent visit to the Lebanese side of the Israel-Lebanon border, Said participated in that most traditional of Arab practices, throwing stones at the Jews.

For all that Sufi mystics appear to be appealing, note that they are the intellectual heirs of the Hashishin of Crusader times, who assassinated (which is the source of the word in English) both Crusaders and those Muslim leaders who accommodated them. Freund really ought to check his history. Islam did not proselytize, it conquered. Only "people of the book" (Jews and Christians) were not forced to convert or die, but if they did not convert they were subjected to extensive disabilities and added taxes. See *The Dhimmi*, by Bat Ye'or (Associated University Press).

Bear in mind that Islam spread by the sword. We in the West are in Dar al Harb, the World of Conflict, which is all of the world not part of Dar al Islam, where Islamic law governs. Promoting theocracy to a degree the medieval Church could only dream of, Islam is in many ways incompatible with Western secularism. Its teachings foster not amity but domination.

However, it is possible that American Muslims (especially native-born ones, who know only American freedoms) can formulate an Islam that is what they say it is, as Muhammad Ali

said in his recent interview in *Reader's Digest*. This is not a call for an inquisition, but rather a call for knowledge. What we know can only help us, while what we do not know can leave us undefended.

David Peters
Los Angeles, CA

Charles Paul Freund replies: Although you wouldn't know it from this letter, I argued that the early, "official," feel-good dialogue about Islam was empty and problematic. But is David Peters' alternative any better? He links Sufism to the Assassins. Islam's mysticism was a rich, established tradition centuries before Assassins founder Hassan al-Sabbah was born. The Assassins were Isma'ilis; their "heirs" are modern Isma'ilis. Isma'ilis of South Asia and the West are among the most liberal and enlightened Muslims in the world. They are evidence of Islam's modernist potential. So is Sunni Turkey, which despite its problems has maintained a secular democracy for 80 years. So are Algeria's besieged secularists. Islam is neither the incarnation of "peace" that the White House claims nor the bogeyman Peters portrays. His charge of "incompatibility," by the way, used to be hurled at Catholics.

My assertion about the relative tolerance of Islam is not controversial. Even as restricted dhimmis, the Jews of Islam for centuries led less restricted and more dignified lives than did Europe's Jews. Until modern times, Islam's Jews were far less likely to be massacred, forcibly ghettoized, Satanized, or subjected to inquisition. Islam wouldn't tolerate such "pagans" as Zoroastrians, but neither would Christendom. Zoroastrians who survived and prospered

Letters are welcome and should be addressed to

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did so among Hindus.

Islam spread in many ways, including conquest and trade. But even after conquest, Islamization was often very gradual. Between Egypt's conquest and the rise of a Muslim majority there, for example, seven centuries passed.

Liberty sans Paradox

Cathy Young's "Liberty's Paradoxes" (December) reads like a reluctant statist's apology for a necessary evil. She marginalizes those who quote Benjamin Franklin as knee-jerk libertarians, too dogmatic to see the value of compromise and consensus in this time of "war."

Law enforcement didn't lack for tools to prevent September's attacks. Institutional stasis and interdepartmental rivalry, inevitable in a massive bureaucracy, were our government's Achilles heel. It was a colossal and

predictable failure, given the \$300 billion spent each year on defense.

President Clinton declared a war on terrorism some time ago, another government effort like the wars on drugs and poverty. Young suggests government can win such wars, ignoring as usual the unblemished record of failure. Time and again we see that expanding law enforcement's power simply corrupts.

Young also derides the notion that giving less offense would reduce our enemies' ire. Like a gambler doubling on a losing bet, she insinuates that a less intrusive foreign policy now would be a sign of weakness. By implication she equates the bombing of civilian targets by U.S. planes with the international terror of McDonald's and Hollywood. As incitements of extremist hatred, these would appear leagues apart.

Young interprets the greatest recent failure of our government to fulfill its first responsibility, national defense, as cause to yield even more liberty and power to our monopolist protectors. A magazine called *reason* is hardly the place I'd expect to see such a viewpoint, unless the parody is intended.

David C. Calderwood
Loves Park, IL

Don't be so quick to sell out our freedoms. Did increased security measures (read: less freedom) stop the Irish Republican Army from bombing in England? Did increased security measures stop the bombings in Lebanon? Did increased security measures stop the embassy bombings? Did increased security measures stop the attacks on September 11th (or did they actually facilitate the terrorists' evil deeds)?

Why do so many people buy into

the increased security scenario, when it has never stopped determined terrorists and probably never will?

Anything that intelligent people in the government put into place can be thwarted by determined, equally intelligent radical nuts.

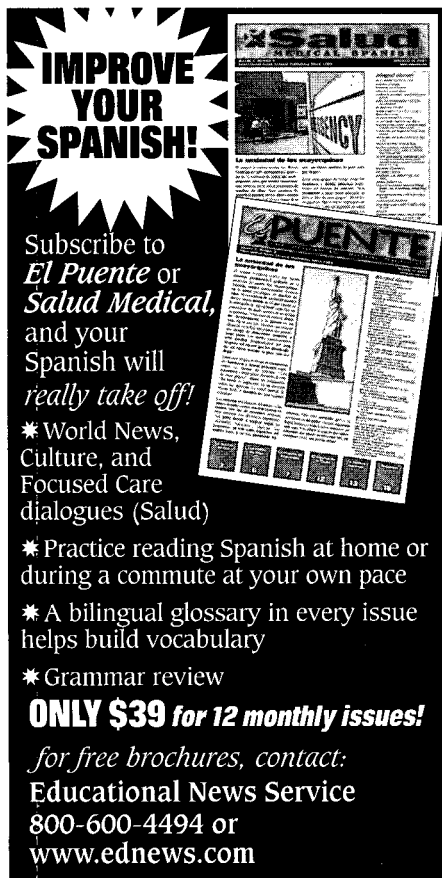
The government has jumped to suspend our freedoms with every attack in recent history: the Kennedy assassination, Oklahoma City, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and now the September 11 events. The fact is that the Constitution was intended to protect us from the government, and we cannot expect the government to enforce it willingly.

David E. Hoffmann
Prescott, AZ

I was pleasantly surprised to read, in the most recent issue, several perspectives on the potential threats to liberty from the ongoing efforts to curb terrorism. There are two points that I believe ought to be made more clearly, however.

First, to those like Cathy Young who advocate more government intelligence gathering and are willing to part with a great deal of their freedom for a sense of safety, recall that this is the same government that fills the "pig book" with \$43 billion of pork barrel spending annually. This is the same government that can't run a school for children and spends more than 50 cents of every dollar it takes in to administer the ever-decreasing remainder, which it then passes on to other incompetents. Let's not place too much stock in the capacity of such an institution to manage this feat.

Second, to those who shudder at every possible tool being placed in the hands of our government to guard against terrorism, the proof will be in the results. What is done with the



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information and how it is used (to successfully head off and prosecute criminals or to punish simple malcontents, activists, and free speech advocates) will be the litmus test.

It is probably time for a wait-and-see approach—reserving legal challenge to the new laws until someone is legitimately aggrieved by their application. I, for one, am not concerned about some underpaid, overworked, shoddy bureaucrat in an office across the continent having a file somewhere among 250 million others that says what Web sites I visited last month, assuming that the capacity to do so will provide some modicum of protection to my family and the American way of life.

Joseph L. Stark
Valencia, CA

Cathy Young replies: To those who believe that I am advocating “statism,” I would like to point out that in “Liberty’s Paradoxes” I was discussing one of the few essential functions of the state. It is one that even the staunchest proponents of limited government recognize: to “insure domestic tranquility” and “provide for the common defense,” in the words of the U.S. Constitution.

The scope of the powers the government should be allowed for this purpose is, of course, subject to debate. Personally, I don’t believe that judicially authorized surveillance of a suspect’s electronic communications equals the loss of a great amount of liberty.

The government may have a mixed track record in combating terrorism (though it is worth noting that we rarely think of the plots that were thwarted, such as the potentially devastating plan to blow up New York City’s Holland and Lincoln tunnels

several years ago). However, there seems to be no realistic alternative.

Rebels on the Air

As a person who works for a large radio corporation (CBS/Infinity), I found Jesse Walker’s article (“Free Your Radio,” December) rather short-sighted and ignorant of recent history. Walker wrote, “Most radio stations today are boring and homogeneous, chains of clones controlled by an ever-dwindling handful of focus-group-driven corporations.” This trend can be directly traced back to the deregulation of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Before 1996, there were plenty of focus-group-driven corporations, but the Telecom Act freed them to spread chains of clones at an unprecedented level.

The niche marketing he deplors is a result of corporations’ owning six or eight full-strength signals in one market. To avoid competing with themselves, they must resort to niche marketing. Small, independent broadcasters cannot possibly compete with media behemoths controlling 40 percent or more of the market share in any given city. In fact, it could be argued that deregulation and the subsequent buying sprees by big corporations drove the price of radio stations far beyond the reach of “mom and pop” broadcasters. Further deregulation will only lead to monopolization. One need only look to the Clear Channel Communications Web site to assess their ultimate goal. They already have their slogan in place: “Clear Channel IS radio.”

Cactus Jack
Production Director, KMLE-FM
Phoenix, AZ

Jesse Walker replies: It’s misleading to focus exclusively on the Telecommu-

nications Act. To the extent that it deregulated radio’s ownership rules, the act was simply continuing a series of changes that began in the early ’90s and continue today. The trouble is, the same Federal Communications Commission that loosened those rules has done almost nothing to eliminate the entry barriers that prevent smaller stations from competing with the chains. The government could expand the broadcast spectrum (by, say, allowing new FM stations to transmit over unused UHF frequencies); it could reduce the costly regulatory requirements faced by start-up stations; it could legalize low-power broadcasting on more than a piddling scale. Instead, it only deregulates to the extent that it helps the established industry, leaving other rules in place or even tightening them. Obviously, this is not the kind of “deregulation” that I’m interested in.

Attention College Students

reason is accepting applications for the 2002 Burton C. Gray Memorial Internship. The intern works 10 weeks during the summer in our Los Angeles office and receives housing, a stipend of \$2,000, and up to \$400 in travel expenses. The job includes reporting and writing for **reason**, helping with research, proofreading, and other tasks. Previous interns have gone on to work at *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and ABC News.

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Bypassing state censors; a courtroom coup; the men who japed; aqua-terror; calculating the cost of war; and drug war heretic

Bypassing the censors

Triangle Boy Howdy

Sara Rimensnyder

IN A PAGE from the handbook on the liberating powers of globalization, thousands of Chinese and Middle Eastern Web surfers are leapfrogging past censors to view *The New York Times*, *Hustler*, and many other sites their governments have decided to “protect” them from.

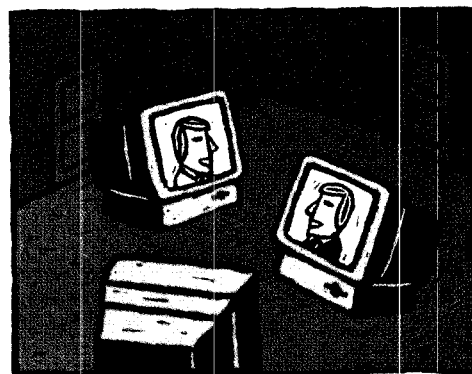
The unfettered Web access comes thanks to an ingenious program called Triangle Boy. It’s the brainchild of 35-year-old Stephen Hsu, the founder of an Emeryville, California, start-up called SafeWeb.

Although a thorough explanation involves a lot of high-tech jargon, the basic idea behind the program is simple: A Chinese surfer finds the Internet address of a computer that has Triangle Boy installed. He then uses that computer as a proxy server to jump to a forbidden site. Once there, Triangle Boy sends the information to a third computer, the server at SafeWeb. SafeWeb encrypts it, makes it look like it originated from the middleman computer, then sends it back to the user in China—hence, the

triangle.

Hsu, who’s on a year-long hiatus from his day job as a theoretical physicist at the University of Oregon, created the software specifically with the idea of circumventing state repression. He offers it for free. The company, meanwhile, has seed money from several venture capital firms (and the Central Intelligence Agency); it plans to offer other privacy services for a fee.

According to *Business 2.0*, users were downloading 300,000 pages daily just months after the program’s June release. Hsu has posted testimonials from some of those users on his site. From one in Saudi Arabia: “Yes, with Triangle Boy I’m able to access ALL my favorite sites again. You just wouldn’t believe it if I told you that our people have even been blocked from educational sites! And of course no one can ask why or say anything to anybody in this country!”



Americans are also finding uses for the program. An employee from Morgan Stanley Dean Witter wrote to say, “SafeWeb is the only way I’ve been able to access my personal email account, which has been blocked by my corporate employer....I’m making sure the word about Triangle Boy gets WIDELY spread around.”

Beltway Econ 101

Dollar Follies

Sam MacDonald

WHEN IS A dollar not a dollar? When it costs you \$1.40, according to a new study released by the Joint Economic Committee (JEC). If you don’t buy that num-



25 years ago in reason

“Is it ‘sick’ to be ‘Utopian’? The use of a term such as ‘sick’ in a post-Szaszian age is, to say the least, naive; so let us translate it in this fashion: Is it perverse, or wicked, or very silly to be ‘utopian’?”

—Ralph Raico, “On Tory Blind Spots”

“B.F. Skinner affirms that society cannot survive without diversity. So, he says, the ‘cultural designer’ must plan for it. Alas, experience demonstrates that planners prefer uniformity.”

—Richard Crum, “Sorting Out Skinner”

“It is a regrettable but undeniable fact that economics ...is liable to recurrent fashions and fads, the periodic re-intrusion into professional discussion of popular superstitions which earlier generations of economists had successfully driven back into the circles of cranks and demagogues.”

—F.A. Hayek, “‘Planning’ Our Way to Serfdom”

“The belief in a society in which the remuneration of individuals is made to correspond to something called social justice is a chimera which is threatening to seduce modern democracy to accept a system that would involve a disastrous loss of personal freedom.”

—F.A. Hayek, “‘Planning’ Our Way to Serfdom”