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Applauding “Courageous” Obama’s “Finest Moment”

The *Washington Post*’s David Ignatius: “I thought the speech Friday night was a model of political courage, in the sense that he said what he believed, knowing that it was going to cost him...”

Reuters Chrystia Freeland: “For American leaders to say, in the face of, you know, some political pressure from their voters, to say actually we believe sufficiently strongly in diversity, in private property rights for our Muslim citizens, I think that’s a great global message.”

— Exchange on ABC’s *This Week*, August 15.

“Democrats should get some spine and say, ‘You know what? I am sworn to uphold and protect the Constitution.’ The President was strong on that on Friday. I think he blew it on Saturday by walking it back. Stay strong. Say it’s about the Constitution.”

— CNN contributor Roland Martin on *Anderson Cooper 360*, August 17.

“The President made a statement and drew a lot of praise for at least taking a stand that was politically courageous, in terms of domestic politics.”

— NBC correspondent Andrea Mitchell on her 1pm ET MSNBC *Andrea Mitchell Reports*, August 16.

“One of the finest moments of his presidency. Obama didn’t just stand up for the legal right of the group to build the Islamic center. He voiced powerful support for their moral right to do so as well, casting it as central to American identity....Obama directly confronted the demagoguery at the core of much of the opposition to this project....Ultimately, though, Obama’s speech transcends the politics of the moment, and will go down as a defining and perhaps even a breakthrough performance.”

— *Washington Post* “Plum Line” blogger Greg Sargent in an August 14 posting.

Mosque Opponents Acting Like 9/11 Terrorists

“When do we stop praising politicians for doing what is right just because it’s not politically expedient? I thought the reason everybody’s groaning all the time about our politicians is because they’re such hacks and nobody stands up for what’s right. Who cares about the concrete? Somebody’s got to say that, you know, we’re not going to act like the people who stole freedom from Americans, the people who attacked America and killed 3,000 people.”

— NBC correspondent Norah O’Donnell on MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*, August 17.

Newt Gingrich: A “Demented, Anger-Infused Doofus”

“Despite all the high-minded words about ‘sensitivity’ for the families of the victims, this is slimeball politics, pure and simple, except for when it descends into outright religious bigotry — which seems to be what happens every time Newt Gingrich opens his mouth. Does that demented, anger-infused doofus actually believe that putting the mosque near Ground Zero is the equivalent of putting a swastika next to the Holocaust Museum?...I mean, what a jerk.”

— *Time*’s Joe Klein writing on the magazine’s “Swampland” blog, August 16.

MSNBC’s Mike Barnicle: “Look, Mika, we’ve descended to one of the lowest points in our politics over the past five, ten years. Newt Gingrich is nothing more than a political pyromaniac here. He is just putting gasoline on fires that don’t even exist....”

Co-host Mika Brzezinski: “That’s a great term....That is such a great term.”

— MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*, August 16.



Mosque Opposition: Just Ignorance, Bigotry & Politics

“The last legal hurdle to the proposed Islamic center near the site of the World Trade Center has been removed, but ignorance, bigotry and politics are more formidable obstacles.... Criticism spans the gamut, from the ill-informed anguish of those who mistakenly view Islam as the malevolent force that brought down the towers to the ill-considered opportunism of right-wing politicians who see Islam as an easy target.”

— *Time*'s Bobby Ghosh in an August 3 Web posting, a shorter version of which appeared in the magazine's August 16 issue.



“His [Obama's] ‘new beginning’ has aroused nervousness in some, especially those who disagree with his counterterrorism policies, or those more comfortable with a vision of America as a white and largely Christian nation, and not the pluralistic melting pot Mr. Obama represents.”

— *New York Times* correspondent Sheryl Gay Stolberg in an August 15 “Political Memo” about the mosque controversy.

“It's clear that the Republicans are trying to demagogue this. It's clear that they're trying to make both this and the 14th Amendment issue big voting issues. It remains to be seen whether they will succeed. But it's really sad and tragic to me.”

— *Salon*'s Joan Walsh on MSNBC's *Hardball*, August 16.

“Last week, a group of senior Republican senators called for hearings on repealing the 14th Amendment; that's the one that affords children born on American soil automatic citizenship. At the same time, Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich were among those posting outraged Twitter updates over the decision to allow an Islamic center and mosque near the site of the fallen trade center towers.... A nativist impulse underlies this type of political appeal, and it is not new. It springs, perhaps, more from human nature than from any defect in the American character; when our way of life feels imperiled, we tend to cast a wary eye toward those who embody otherness.”

— *New York Times* political columnist Matt Bai in an August 8 “Week in Review” piece.

Berating “Reprehensible” Mosque Foes Who “Foment Hatred”

“The proposed Islamic center near Ground Zero created a convenient rallying point for those who instead want to foment hatred, according to national Islamic leaders and academics who study Islam.... Which is why it is reprehensible for people claiming national leadership to stir the pot.”

— From a *USA Today* editorial, August 16.

If You're Against This Mosque, You're Against “Freedom”

“I was personally deeply saddened by the ADL's stand, because five years ago the organization honored me with its Hubert Humphrey Award for First Amendment freedoms. Given the position that they have taken on a core issue of religious freedom in America, I cannot in good conscience keep that award. So this week I'm going to return to the ADL the handsome medal and the generous honorarium that came with it. I hope this might spur them to see that they have made a mistake, and to return to their historic, robust defense of freedom of religion in America....”

— *Newsweek* international editor Fareed Zakaria on his CNN program, *Fareed Zakaria GPS*, August 8, talking about the Jewish Anti-Defamation League's opposition to the Ground Zero mosque.



America Not Guilty of an Anti-Muslim Holocaust – At Least, Not Yet

“Finally, tonight, as promised, a ‘Special Comment’ on the inaccurately described Ground Zero mosque. ‘They came first for the communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. And then they came for me and by that time, no one was left to speak up.’ Pastor Martin Niemoller's words are well known.... In quoting him, I make no direct comparison between the attempts to suppress the building of a Muslim religious center in downtown Manhattan and the unimaginable nightmare of the Holocaust. Such a comparison is ludicrous – at least, it is now.”

— MSNBC's Keith Olbermann delivering a “Special Comment” on *Countdown*, August 16.

Newsweek Rates America Only 11th Best, Blames Bush...

“America hasn’t recovered from the serious blows to its stature delivered by nearly a decade of policy debacles. As Obama never tires of reminding the American public – which is listening less and less, judging by his poll ratings – he inherited a Herculean task: the Augean-stable-size mess left behind by George W. Bush. First there was the diversion of military resources and attention from Afghanistan to Iraq – a draining, mis-directed war and occupation that many believe never should have been launched. Then there was the long period of fiscal, regulatory, and financial recklessness that contributed to the worst-ever downturn since the Great Depression. Finally, Washington squandered its chance to lead on climate change.”

– *Newsweek’s* Michael Hirsh in the August 23 & 30 cover story ranking “The Best Countries in the World,” which awarded the U.S. 11th place.



...But Applauds Countries with a Socialist Approach

“European countries remain strong in this category... In Spain, for example, universal coverage is a constitutionally guaranteed right, and there are no out-of-pocket expenses aside from some prescription drugs.”

– From *Newsweek’s* ranking of the best countries on health care. Spain was rated #4; the U.S. put at #26.

“*Maman* is sitting pretty, with as much as seven months’ paid leave, low-cost health care, and a baby nurse who makes house calls. If she’s sick, the government sends someone to do the family’s laundry.”

– *Newsweek* explaining its choice of France as the “Best Place to Have a Baby.”

A Spanish Tutor Would Have Been a Lot Cheaper

“Politically, it was not a smart move. But in the grand scheme of things, what real difference does it make? I would guess that Sasha is probably learning some Spanish. Maybe she learned a little more Spanish on her trip.”

– ABC’s Cokie Roberts talking about First Lady Michelle Obama’s vacation on the August 9 *Good Morning America*.

“Juvenile” Stunt vs. “Coolest” Photo-Op Ever

“Barack Obama’s announcement today of the end of the combat phase in Iraq, and the beginning of a 16-month period of advice and support for the Iraqi security forces before U.S. troops leave in 2011, will not be remembered as vividly as George Bush’s juvenile march across the deck of an aircraft carrier, costumed as a combat aviator in a golden sunset.”

– *Time’s* Joe Klein writing on his magazine’s “Swampland” blog, August 2.

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“That was probably the coolest presidential image since Bill Pullman played the jet fighter pilot in the movie *Independence Day*. That was the first thing that came to mind for me.”

– Klein on CBS’s *Face the Nation*, May 4, 2003, discussing Bush’s May 1, 2003 landing on the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln* to announce the end of major combat operations in Iraq. (Hat tip to *The Weekly Standard*.)

Washington Post: Not Liberal Enough for This Reader

“The Aug. 6 front-page story about the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan referred to ‘a court with four solid conservatives and four firm liberals.’... There are not ‘four firm liberals’ on the Supreme Court, and there hasn’t been even a single ‘liberal’ on the court in years. The *Post* should recognize philosophical reality and refer to the ‘moderate’ and ‘conservative’ wings of the court, although ‘moderate’ and ‘radical-conservative’ would be more accurate.”

– Letter to the editor from Alexandria, Virginia resident Robert B. McNeil, August 14 *Washington Post*.

Notable Quotables

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