

# SMEARCASTING:

How Islamophobes spread fear, bigotry and misinformation

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# **Smearcasting:**

## **How Islamophobes spread fear, bigotry and misinformation**

**By FAIR**

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## Making Islamophobia Mainstream: How Muslim-bashers broadcast their bigotry

A remarkable thing happened at the National Book Critics Circle (NBCC) nominations in February 2007: The normally highbrow and tolerant group nominated for best book in the field of criticism a book widely viewed as denigrating an entire religious group.

The nomination of Bruce Bawer's *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West From Within* didn't pass without controversy. Past nominee Eliot Weinberger denounced the book at the NBCC's annual gathering, calling it "racism as criticism" (**New York Times**, 2/8/07). NBCC board president John Freeman wrote on the group's blog (**Critical Mass**, 2/4/07): "I have never been more embarrassed by a choice than I have been with Bruce Bawer's *While Europe Slept*.... Its hyperventilated rhetoric tips from actual critique into Islamophobia."

Though it didn't ultimately win the award, *While Europe Slept*'s recognition in the highest literary circles was emblematic of a mainstreaming of Islamophobia, not just in American publishing but in the broader media.

This report takes a fresh look at Islamophobia in today's media and its perpetrators, outlining some of the behind-the-scenes connections that are rarely explored in media. The report also provides four snapshots, or "case studies," describing how Islamophobes continue to manipulate media in order to paint Muslims with a broad, hateful brush. Our aim is to document smearcasting: the public writings and appearances of Islamophobic activists and pundits who intentionally and regularly spread fear, bigotry and misinformation.

The term "Islamophobia" refers to hostility toward Islam and Muslims that tends to dehumanize an entire faith, portraying it as fundamentally alien and attributing to it an inherent, essential set of negative traits such as irrationality, intolerance and violence. And not unlike the charges made in the classical document of anti-Semitism, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, some of Islamophobia's more virulent expressions--like *While Europe Slept*--include evocations of Islamic designs to dominate the West.

Islamic institutions and Muslims, of course, should be subject to the same kind of scrutiny and criticism as anyone else. For instance, when a Norwegian Islamic Council debates whether gay men and lesbians should be executed, one may forcefully condemn individuals or groups sharing that opinion without pulling all European Muslims into it, as did Bawer's **Pajamas Media** post (8/7/08), "European Muslims Debate: Should Gays Be Executed?"

Similarly, extremists who justify their violent actions by invoking some particular interpretation of Islam can be criticized without implicating the enormously diverse population of Muslims around the world. After all, reporters managed to cover the Oklahoma City bombing by Timothy McVeigh--an adherent of the racist Christian Identity sect--without resorting to generalized statements about "Christian terrorism." Likewise, media have covered acts of terrorism by fanatics who are Jewish--for instance the Hebron massacre carried out by Baruch Goldstein (**Extra!**, 5/6/94)--without implicating the entirety of Judaism.

In works such as *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*, cultural analyst Edward Said criticized an ideology that he argued treated peoples of the Middle East and Asia, particularly Muslims, as the "other"--

inherently different from and inferior to the people of “the West.” It’s not hard to find support for his thesis in U.S. establishment journalism.

In reporting on an Iraqi family’s refusal to accept a cash payment after their son was shot dead by private U.S. security contractor Blackwater, the **L.A. Times** (5/4/08) emphasized that the “shooting and its aftermath show the deep disconnect between the American legal process and the traditional culture of Iraq,” explaining that “traditional Arab society values honor and decorum above all.”

Similarly, a **New York Times** news article (8/25/08) about the Afghan response to a U.S. military attack in Afghanistan that killed 90 civilians noted that bombings and house raids “are seen as culturally unacceptable by many Afghans who guard their privacy fiercely,” while the detention of hundreds of Afghans without trial was said to have “stirred up Afghans’ strong independent streak and ancient dislike of invaders.”

Why is it necessary to invoke cultural stereotypes to explain why you won’t accept an envelope full of cash after mercenaries kill your child? Or to explain quite normal opposition to being bombed, detained or aggressively searched? Because the widespread assumption in the U.S. media is that people in Iraq and Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the Muslim world, are fundamentally unlike Americans.

There are many varieties of Muslim-bashing on display in the media. One strain holds that Islam is inherently evil or violent--a “bloody, brutal type of religion,” as televangelist Pat Robertson put it (**700 Club**, 4/28/06). Robert Spencer, who has authored two **New York Times** best sellers on Islam, puts a scholarly face on Islamophobia, arguing that (**Emory Wheel**, 2/21/07) “jihad as warfare against non-believers in order to institute ‘Sharia’ worldwide...is a constant element of mainstream Islamic theology.”

Islamophobes like Sean Hannity dwell on “the silence of moderate Muslims,” whom Hannity says (**Hannity & Colmes**, 7/13/07) are insufficiently “critical against those that would hijack their religion”--placing a burden on Muslims to take responsibility for extremist fringe elements of their religion that is not likewise applied to Christians. Also exemplifying this form of Islamophobia is **CNN Headline News** host Glenn Beck, who said to Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), the first Muslim elected to the U.S. Congress (**Glenn Beck**, 11/14/06), “Sir, prove to me that you are not working with our enemies,” and on his syndicated radio show warned (**Glenn Beck Program**, 8/10/06):

**All you Muslims who have sat on your frickin’ hands the whole time and have not been marching in the streets and have not been saying, ‘Hey, you know what? There are good Muslims and bad Muslims. We need to be the first ones in the recruitment office lining up to shoot the bad Muslims in the head.’ I’m telling you, with God as my witness... human beings are not strong enough, unfortunately, to restrain themselves from putting up razor wire and putting you on one side of it.**

Another category of Islamophobia finds militant Muslims lurking around every corner and paints them as an existential threat to the U.S. and its allies. The documentary *Obsession: Radical Islam’s War Against the West* (2006), which has been a mainstay of David Horowitz’s “Islamofascism Awareness Week,” (see the sidebar Islamofascism), describes “radical Islam” as a menace comparable to Adolf Hitler that, according to the film’s website, “is threatening, with all the means at its disposal, to bow Western civilization under the yoke of its values.” Meanwhile, Daniel Pipes has warned of an Islamic threat to America posed by Muslim groups ranging from the college campus-based Muslim Student

Associations to secular groups like the Arab Anti-Defamation League (see **Inter-Press Service**, 2/24/05). Pipes suggests (**Middle East Quarterly**, 3/8/06) a stealth takeover by an ill-defined “Wahhabi lobby” is in the offing, arguing (**IPS**, 2/24/05) that “in the long term... the legal activities of Islamists pose as much or even a greater set of challenges than the illegal ones.”

The “war on terror” has bolstered a class of Islamophobic self-proclaimed “Islamic terrorism experts,” such as **NBC**’s terrorism analyst Steve Emerson, who notoriously proclaimed (**CBS News**, 4/19/95) that the bloodthirstiness of the Oklahoma City bombing was “a Middle Eastern trait.”

Some strains of Muslim-bashing share a good deal in common with the racist pseudo-science of eugenics--most notably Mark Steyn’s writings about the “demographic decline” manifest in Europe’s growing Muslim population. Pipes struck a similar note with his warnings (**National Review**, 11/19/90) that “Western societies are unprepared for the massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and maintaining different standards of hygiene” and that “Muslim customs are more troublesome than most.”

This range of anti-Muslim views finds a vehicle in a range of online, radio and print outlets. Some of the harshest Muslim-bashing can be found in the right-wing blogosphere (**Little Green Footballs**, **FrontPageMag.com**, **WorldNetDaily**, **Gates of Vienna**, **Michelle Malkin.com**, **Daniel Pipes.org**) and on the websites that link to these blogs and generate their own anti-Muslim content (Middle East Forum, Campus Watch, **Jihad Watch**, **Militant Islam Monitor**), as well as on right-wing talk radio, where hosts like Michael Savage rabble-rouse with overtly bigoted commentary like (**Savage Nation**, 7/2/07), “When I see a woman walking around with a burqa, I see... a hateful Nazi who would like to cut your throat and kill your children.”

At the same time, lengthy treatises that attempt to put a more scholarly facade on Islamophobia provide fuel for those fires. In addition to Bawer’s book, recent years have seen publishers like Regnery unleashing a number of successful books that are inarguably Islamophobic: Mark Steyn’s **New York Times** best seller *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It* (2006) and Robert Spencer’s two **Times** best sellers, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)* (2005) and *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World’s Most Intolerant Religion* (2006) join other Muslim-bashing books from overseas, including Melanie Phillips’ *Londonistan* (2006) and Orianna Fallaci’s *The Force of Reason* (2004), which have thrived in the U.S. book market.

The Islamophobia generated in these backwaters finds its way into the mainstream, accessing a national platform and audience through such tributaries as the cable TV and radio shows hosted by **Fox News**’ Sean Hannity and **CNN Headline News**’ Glenn Beck. Islamophobic ideas get important institutional support through conservative newspapers such as the **New York Sun** and **New York Post**, both of which regularly publish Pipes’ columns, and many more centrist papers carry Michelle Malkin’s nationally syndicated column.

Together, these Muslim-bashing outlets and pundits constitute what is, in effect, a network. Funded by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, a prominent right-wing foundation, Daniel Pipes’ Middle East Forum is connected to a range of other right-wing think tanks; its editors and editorial board include representatives from the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Pipes’ Campus Watch and Robert Spencer’s **Jihad Watch** operate out of David Horowitz’s Freedom Center. Prominent members of this network also have official connections; Pipes, for instance, was appointed by George W. Bush to the board of the U.S. Institute of Peace in 2003.

Muslim-bashers often have much more certainty than expertise, as exemplified by Alan Dershowitz (**Boston Globe**, 6/5/08), who traced “the beginning of Islamic terrorism in America” to the assassination of Robert Kennedy by Sirhan Sirhan--a Palestinian Christian. But whether their fears are reality-based or not, Islamophobia is a force to be reckoned with.

Writing and research by Steve Rendall, Isabel Macdonald, Veronica Cassidy and Dina Marguerite Jacir  
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# The Dirty Dozen

## Who's who among America's leading Islamophobes

Bigots aren't born, and hate doesn't spring up on its own; as the song says, "You've got to be carefully taught." The following list includes some of the media's leading teachers of anti-Muslim bigotry, serving various roles in the Islamophobic movement. Some write the books that serve as intellectual fodder, others serve as promoters, others play the roles of provocateurs and rabble-rousers. Some ply their bigotry in the media's mainstream, others in the Internet's tributaries, while still others work talk radio's backwaters. Together with uncounted smaller players, they form a network that teaches Americans to see Islam in fearful terms and their Muslim neighbors as suspects.

### David Horowitz

David Horowitz is the Islamophobia movement's premier promoter. Through his "Islamofascism Awareness Week" (see Islamofascism Case Study), which brought leading Muslim-bashers to more than a hundred college campuses in October 2007, and via his website, **FrontPage Magazine**, which features the movement's leading writers and links to other anti-Muslim sites, Horowitz has made himself the chief publicist of the Islamophobic movement. (Anti-Muslim and anti-Arab writings at Horowitz's **FrontPage Magazine** have been exposed for inaccuracy by, among other outlets, the **New Yorker** magazine--4/14/08.)

But more than a promoter, Horowitz is also a key participant. He appears in his own venues as well as in other right-wing arenas, such as the **Washington Times**, the **Weekly Standard** and **Fox News Channel**.

In one **Fox** appearance (5/9/08), he linked Muslim student associations on college campuses across the U.S. to the "terrorist Jihad against the West":

**The point here is that there are 150 Muslim students' associations, which are coddled by university administrations and treated as though they were ethnic or religious groups, when they are political groups that are arms of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is the fountainhead of the terrorist jihad against the West.**

No doubt the students are part of the "between 150 million and 750 million Muslims" Horowitz claims "support a holy war against Christians, Jews and other Muslims" (**Columbia Spectator**, 10/15/07).

During a speech at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Horowitz accused students wearing green in support of the schools' Muslim Student Association of supporting Hamas, and students wearing Arab Keffiyehs of honoring Yassir Arafat and terrorism (**Santa Barbara Independent**, 5/15/08).

### Robert Spencer

According to American Muslim and former Nixon advisor Robert Crane (*The Politics of Islam(ism): Decolonising the Postcolonial*, 11/10-11/07), Robert Spencer is "the principal leader... in the new

academic field of Islam-bashing.”

Spencer is the author of several books attacking Islam, including the **New York Times** bestsellers *The Truth About Muhammad, Founder of the World’s Most Intolerant Religion* (Regnery, 2006) and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)* (Regnery, 2005). He is the publisher of the “notoriously Islamophobic website” **Jihad Watch** (**Guardian**, 2/7/06), a subsidiary of the David Horowitz Freedom Center; a columnist for right-wing outlets like **Human Events** and **WorldNetDaily**; and a recurring guest on Glenn Beck’s **CNN Headline News** show, as well as several **Fox News** shows.

Though his scholarship has been questioned by Islamic scholars (e.g. Crane, **AmericanMuslim.com**, 10/20/07; Louay M. Safi, **Media Monitors Network**, 12/29/05; Khalil Mohammed, **FrontPage Magazine**, 4/18/05), Spencer serves as an intellectual force in the movement, specializing in one-sided interpretations of the Quran. He has written (cited in Crane, **MuslimAmerican.com**, 10/20/07) of Osama bin Laden’s use of quotes from the Quran:

**Of course, the devil can quote scripture for his own purpose, but Osama’s use of these and other passages in his messages is consistent (as we shall see) with traditional understanding of the Quran. When modern-day Jews and Christians read their Bibles, they simply don’t interpret the passages cited as exhorting them to violent actions against unbelievers. This is due to the influence of centuries of interpretative traditions that have moved them away from literalism regarding these passages. But in Islam, there is no comparable interpretative tradition.**

Yet Islam does in fact have an interpretive tradition, which Spencer seems bent on ignoring. His **New York Times** bestseller *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam* has been faulted (Crane, **AmericanMuslim.com**, 10/20/07) for promoting a Puffin English-language version of the Quran that contains no explanatory commentary as superior to versions which include “many thousands of footnotes evaluating 14 centuries of interpretative tradition” and “the wealth of classical Islamic scholarship on both the inner and outer meaning of the Quran and on the hadith that reflect this wisdom.”

According to Crane, “Spencer’s readers are carefully steered away from all contact with the Islamic interpretative tradition, which equals or exceeds that of any other religion, because any scholarly knowledge about Islam would expose all his extremist interpretations to ridicule.”

By selectively ignoring inconvenient Islamic texts and commentaries, Spencer concludes that Islam is innately extremist and violent, and,

**Unfortunately, however, jihad as warfare against non-believers in order to institute “Sharia” worldwide is not propaganda or ignorance, or a heretical doctrine held by a tiny minority of extremists. Instead, it is a constant element of mainstream Islamic theology. (Jihad Watch, 3/3/07).**

Of course, a similarly selective reading of the Torah might lead one to conclude that Jews favor killing homosexuals, as well as those who wear garments that mix cotton and wool. Spencer’s methods have prompted even conservatives such as Dinesh D’Souza (who challenged his views on Islam in a **C-SPAN** debate, 3/1/07, and on his blog, **AOL News Bloggers**, 3/2/07) and Stephen Schwartz (**FrontPageMag.com**, 10/28/04) to denounce him as one-sided and intolerant.

But those methods have made Spencer a mainstay in the Islamophobia circuit, featured, for example, at Horowitz's 2007 Islamofascism Awareness events. And they haven't decreased his popularity in official circles: His website boasts that he has led seminars on Islam and jihad for, among others, the U.S. Central Command, the Department of Homeland Security, the Joint Terrorism Task Force and "the U.S. intelligence community."

## Daniel Pipes

The founder of the Middle East Forum think tank, Pipes has been introduced by the national media as a "scholar" of Islam (e.g., **CBS Sunday Morning**, 9/10/06; **Fox News Special Report**, 11/26/02) and a "noted Middle East expert" (**CNN Moneyline**, 5/8/03) who was "years ahead of the curve in identifying the threat of radical Islam" (**CBS Sunday Morning**, 9/10/06).

However, Pipes' "expertise" has included erroneously linking the Oklahoma City bombing to Islamic groups (**USA Today**, 4/20/95), as well as warning (**National Review**, 11/19/90): "Western European societies are unprepared for the massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and maintaining different standards of hygiene.... All immigrants bring exotic customs and attitudes, but Muslim customs are more troublesome than most."

A defender of racial profiling of Arab-Americans (**CNN American Morning**, 11/18/02), Pipes has also warned (American Jewish Congress, 10/21/01) that "the presence, and increased stature, and affluence, and enfranchisement of American Muslims" entail "true dangers" for American Jews. As one of the leaders of the "Stop the Madrassa" campaign against a secular Brooklyn-based Arabic language school (see sidebar, p. n), he himself has admitted (**New York Times.com**, 4/28/2008) to misleading the public by using the word "madrassa" to get attention.

His columns are featured in the **New York Sun**, **New York Post** and **National Review**, and have also been published in the **New York Times**, **Washington Post**, **Wall Street Journal**, **USA Today** and **Time**. Pipes has been interviewed on **CNN**, **MSNBC** and **PBS**, as well as on **NPR**. A Bush-appointed director of the U.S. Institute of Peace (2003-05), he has a growing reach on college campuses through his Campus Watch initiative, which encourages students in McCarthyite fashion to monitor their professors' political views and report deviations from the conservative ideology Pipes espouses.

## Michael Savage

If Daniel Pipes and Robert Spencer serve the movement by providing intellectual arguments for its rank and file, Michael Savage serves as its angry rabble-rouser. And Savage's reach is remarkable: His radio show **Savage Nation** reaches a reported 8.25 million listeners per week (**Talkers Magazine**, Spring/08), the third most popular political talk radio show in the country (trailing only Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity).

Savage is notorious for his relentlessly hateful language--he was fired from his **MSNBC** gig when he labeled a caller a "sodomite" and told him to "get AIDS and die" (**FAIR Action Alert**, 7/7/03)--and Muslims are often his target. "When I see a woman walking around with a burqa," Savage told his listeners on July 2, 2007, "I see a Nazi... a hateful Nazi who would like to cut your throat and kill your

children.”

Savage sees a monolithic Islamic scheme to take over the U.S.—“We know you want to take over America. We know you wanna push your religion down everyone’s throat,” (**Savage Nation**, 7/2/07), and imagines himself one of the few brave souls standing up against the onslaught (10/29/07): “I’m not gonna put my wife in a hijab. And I’m not gonna put my daughter in a burqa. And I’m not getting on my all-fours and braying to Mecca.... I don’t wanna hear anymore about Islam. Take your religion and shove it up your behind.”

Savage has even called (4/17/06) for killing a hundred million Muslims, saying that people

**are very depressed by the weakness that America is showing to these psychotics in the Muslim world. They say, “Oh, there’s a billion of them.” I said, “So, kill 100 million of them, then there’ll be 900 million of them.” I mean, would you rather die--would you rather us die than them? I mean, what is it going to take for you people to wake up? Would you rather we disappear or we die? Or would you rather they disappear and they die? Because you’re going to have to make that choice sooner rather than later.**

## **Pat Robertson**

If you’re looking for Christian charity toward Muslims, don’t look to Rev. Pat Robertson or his **Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN)**. Robertson subscribes to Robert Spencer’s view that Islam is, in its essence, violent and irrational. He describes (**700 Club**, 8/29/06) Osama bin Laden as a true disciple of the Quran “because he’s following through literally word-for-word what it says.”

Robertson tells viewers of his signature **CBN** show, the **700 Club**, that Islam is “not a religion” but a “worldwide political movement... meant to subjugate all people under Islamic law” (6/12/07). At the same time, he claims Islam is a “bloody, brutal type of religion” (4/28/06) whose followers only “deal with history and the truth with violence” and “don’t understand what reasoned dialogue is” (9/25/06).

When cartoons that portrayed Muhammad negatively sparked protest among Muslims, Robertson announced (3/13/06): “These people are crazed fanatics, and I want to say it now: I believe it’s motivated by demonic power. It is satanic and it’s time we recognize what we’re dealing with.”

Robertson is not ranting that his enemies are possessed by demons on a street corner; his soapbox is a world-wide television network reaching 200 countries, and a show (**700 Club**) reaching 97 percent of U.S. television markets (**CBN.com**). His show also serves as a platform for other Islamophobes (e.g., Robert Spencer, 9/21/06; Daniel Pipes, 4/9/03).

## **Sean Hannity**

Remarking on reports that U.S. congressman Keith Ellison, a Muslim, was planning to be sworn in with a Quran, **Fox News** personality Sean Hannity (**Hannity & Colmes**, 11/30/06) drew a parallel between Islam and Nazism, asking a guest on his show, “Would you have allowed him to choose, you know, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which is the Nazi bible?” (Hannity insisted he was not equating *Mein Kampf* and the Quran, rendering his point entirely unclear.) But more important than his occasional

personal forays into Muslim-bashing, Hannity regularly provides a welcoming national platform to some of the country's leading Islamophobes through his nationally syndicated **Sean Hannity Show** on radio and his **Hannity & Colmes** show on **Fox News** (with only occasional challenges on **Hannity & Colmes** by co-host Alan Colmes).

On the **Sean Hannity Show** (2/9/04), U.S. Representative Peter King (R.-N.Y.) told Hannity's listeners that 85 percent of mosques in America are "ruled by the extremists," constituting "an enemy living amongst us." King added that while most American Muslims were more moderate, "they don't come forward, they don't tell the police."

Hannity's remarks on the Quran came in a show (**Hannity & Colmes**, 11/30/06) that featured talk show host Dennis Prager, who denounced Ellison's plans to be sworn in on the Islamic book. Hannity uncritically summarized his argument for him: "You said that his doing so will embolden Islamic extremists and make new ones, and they'll see it as the first sign and realization of a greatest goal, which is the, you know, making Islam the religion of America."

Dirty Dozen member Mark Steyn explained on **Hannity & Colmes** (1/30/07) that Islam was really "a political project that has opened up branch offices on just about every Main Street throughout the Western world," and which featured religious leaders interested in "overthrowing 10 Downing Street and Buckingham Palace and the White House." Hannity's response: "Well, then you have to say that that's a threat within a culture, Mark. I mean, you know, here you have a culture within a culture that's talking about destroying outside culture."

Also on **Hannity & Colmes** (9/18/02), Pat Robertson called Islam fraudulent and a scam, Mohammad "an absolute wild-eyed fanatic," and said that Al Qaeda was merely "carrying out Islam." Other Islamophobes that have appeared on Hannity's two shows include Ann Coulter, David Horowitz and Daniel Pipes.

## **Bill O'Reilly**

After the September 11 attacks, **Fox News** host Bill O'Reilly (9/17/01; FAIR Action Alert, 9/21/01) had a whole list of predominantly Muslim countries that he proposed to attack if they did not submit to the U.S.--starting with Afghanistan:

**The U.S. should bomb the Afghan infrastructure to rubble--the airport, the power plants, their water facilities and the roads.... This is a very primitive country. And taking out their ability to exist day to day will not be hard.... If they don't rise up against this criminal government, they starve, period.**

Also on his list were Iraq ("Their infrastructure must be destroyed and the population made to endure yet another round of intense pain") and Libya ("Nothing goes in, nothing goes out.... Let them eat sand").

This enthusiasm he has expressed for attacking countries with Muslim populations is an O'Reilly trademark (e.g., **Radio Factor**, 6/18/04, 3/8/06, 7/26/06). In fairness, he's also expressed similar interest in decimating non-Muslim countries. (See **Extra!**, 7-8/99.) But his disregard for Muslim civilians is matched by the anti-Muslim sentiments he frequently expresses on both his nationally

syndicated radio show, the **Radio Factor**, which has a reach of 3.5 million listeners (**Talkers Magazine**, Spring/08) and cable TV show.

O'Reilly has bemoaned (**O'Reilly Factor**, 7/8/05) the fact that areas of London are “just packed with just dense Muslim neighborhoods, which breed this kind of contempt for Western society. Why do they let them in?” He defended airport security profiling of Muslims (**O'Reilly Factor**, 8/16/06), saying: “We’re not at war with Granny Frickin. We’re at war with Muslim fanatics. So all young Muslims should be subjected to more scrutiny than Granny”--a move that he said would not be “racial profiling” but rather “criminal profiling.”

O'Reilly compared a University of South Carolina assignment asking incoming freshmen to read a book called *Approaching the Quran: The Early Revelations* to teaching Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in 1941 (**O'Reilly Factor**, 7/10/02). O'Reilly also told **Stuff** magazine (11/02; **Extra! Update**, 6/03) that “the most unattractive women in the world are probably in the Muslim countries.” On his syndicated radio program (**Radio Factor**, 11/29/06), O'Reilly blamed killings in Iraq on the religion of its people: “They’re all Muslims, and they’re doing what they do. They’re killing each other. And they’re killing Americans.”

Like fellow cable hosts Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck, O'Reilly offers a national platform to some of the most egregious Islamophobes. His **O'Reilly Factor**, which consistently leads ratings in the world of cable news with an audience of over 2 million prime time viewers (**New York Times**, 8/22/08) has hosted such noted Dirty Dozen members as Robert Spencer (11/20/06) and Pat Robertson, who declared on the **O'Reilly Factor** (2/27/02) that “out of a billion-plus people there are probably 150 million really fire-breathing Muslims.”

## Mark Steyn

Mark Steyn has a penchant for using ethnic slurs, including “chinks” and “japs” (**Spectator**, 3/24/01), but he is at his most prolific and poisonous on the subject of Muslims. In his 2006 **New York Times** best seller, *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It*, Steyn warns of the “demographic decline” posed by Europe's emerging Muslim population and suggests there are lessons for Europeans in the Balkan example of ethnic cleansing. As he explains, “You can't buck demography--except through civil war”:

**The Serbs figured that out--as other Continentals will in the years ahead: If you can't outbreed the enemy, cull 'em. The problem that Europe faces is that Bosnia's demographic profile is now the model for the entire continent.**

It's enough to make one wonder what Steyn has in mind when he insists that Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama is “a Muslim” (**Chicago Sun-Times**, 1/21/07).

Islamophobic rants on Europe's demographic decline and “grim Eurostatistics” (**National Review**, 6/2/08) are a regular feature of Steyn's columns, which run in the **National Review** and **New York Sun**. In addition to writing frequently in other major U.S. outlets, including the **Wall Street Journal**, **Chicago Sun-Times** and **Atlantic Monthly**, Steyn often substitutes for talkshow hosts Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity.

## Steven Emerson

The founder and executive director of the Investigative Project on Terrorism think tank, Emerson regularly crops up as an “expert on Islamic terrorism” (**New York Times**, 1/16/01) in national media outlets ranging from the **New York Times** and **Washington Post** to **CNN** and **NBC News** (where he is employed as an analyst); he specializes in advancing allegations linking Muslim groups in the U.S. to fundamentalist Islamic international terrorism.

A proponent of a theory that “the U.S. has become occupied fundamentalist territory” (**Jerusalem Post**, 8/8/97), he has written (**Jewish Monthly**, 3/95; **Extra!** 7-8/95) that “the level of vitriol against Jews and Christianity within contemporary Islam... sanctions genocide, planned genocide, as part of its religious doctrine.” Veteran reporter Robert Friedman accused Emerson of “creating mass hysteria against American Arabs” (**Nation**, 5/15/95) with his film *Jihad in America*.

As a consultant for an **Associated Press** series about American Muslim groups, Emerson presented **AP** reporters with what he claimed were FBI documents describing mainstream American Muslim groups with alleged terrorist sympathies, according to the **AP** series’ lead writer, Richard Cole (**Extra!**, 7-8/95). However, Cole said that **AP** staff discovered that the dossier was almost identical to one earlier authored by Emerson himself. Emerson’s FBI dossier “was really his,” according to Cole. “He had edited out all phrases, taken out anything that made it look like his.”

Emerson erroneously blamed the Oklahoma City bombing on Middle Eastern groups, proclaiming on **CBS Evening News** (4/19/95; **Extra!** 1-2/99): “This was done with the attempt to inflict as many casualties as possible. That is a Middle Eastern trait.” He said on **CNBC** (8/23/96) that “it was a bomb that brought down TWA Flight 800”; investigations by the National Transportation Safety Agency (8/23/00) and the FBI (11/18/97) concluded otherwise. He also misidentified (**CNN**, 3/2/93) the perpetrators of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing--blaming it, ironically enough, on Yugoslavians, when the people convicted of the attack were Arabs.

Despite his track record, he continues to be identified as a “terrorism expert” (**Fox News Hannity & Colmes**, 1/11/08; **NBC Today**, 6/4/07, **Wall Street Journal**, 6/6/07). Emerson can still be heard testifying in congressional committees on terrorism (**CQ Congressional Testimony**, 4/9/08, 7/31/08), as well as on the media, in the middle of discussions about Islamic terrorism, warning (**CNBC’s Kudlow & Company**, 6/8/07) of the FBI’s failure to “battle... groups like the Council on American-Islamic Relations and other jihadists that don’t break the law.”

## Michelle Malkin

Michelle Malkin calls Islam “the religion of perpetual outrage” on her two blogs, **MichelleMalkin.com** (8/1/06, 2/11/08) and **Hot Air** (2/9/08), though Malkin herself seems remarkably easy to outrage. When celebrity chef Rachael Ray was featured in a 2008 Dunkin’ Donuts ad wearing a black-and-white paisley scarf that vaguely resembled an Arab keffiyeh, Malkin created such an uproar over what she imagined to be a “hate couture” symbol of “murderous Palestinian jihad” (**MichelleMalkin.com**, 5/28/08) that Dunkin’ Donuts pulled the ad and issued an apology (**Huffington Post**, 5/28/08).

In her book *In Defense of Internment: The Case for Racial Profiling in WWII and the War on Terror*, Malkin argued that the mass incarceration of Japanese-Americans was explained and justified by what

she presented as evidence of subversion; she drew a present-day parallel to alleged subversion amongst Muslim and Arab populations in the U.S. today. The main thesis of the book was condemned as historically incorrect by the Historians' Committee for Fairness (8/31/04), which stated that Malkin's book was "contradicted by several decades of scholarly research, including works by the official historian of the United States Army and an official U.S. government commission."

On her website (8/10/06) Malkin explained why she no longer uses the term "Islamofascism":

**I stopped using the terms "Islamic fascist" and "Islamofascism" a while ago... because they obscure rather than clarify. The views held by the Muslim jihadis who want to destroy us are not marginal views held only by a minority of "Islamic fascists."**

Malkin is a **New York Times** bestselling author and was named by the London **Observer** (3/16/08) one of the 50 most powerful bloggers. Her columns are also published on **Vdare**, the white nationalist website (**Extra!**, 3-4/05).

## **Glenn Beck**

Glenn Beck claims he doesn't hate Islam, just its "evil" extremists, but during his eponymous **CNN Headline News** show and the **Glenn Beck Program**--the third highest-rated national radio talk show among adults ages 25 to 54 (**CNN.com**)--he has repeatedly associated Islam with Nazism. He drew a parallel between *Mein Kampf* and "jihad" because, he said, both mean "my struggle" (**Glenn Beck**, 11/17/06), and he has warned (**Glenn Beck**, 7/12/06) of "World War III and the impending apocalypse," declaring that "whether you like it or not, this is a religious war. Radical Muslims want to wipe everybody else off the face of the earth."

Beck reserves some hate-talk even for "good" Muslims (**Glenn Beck Program**, 8/10/06):

**All you Muslims who have sat on your frickin' hands the whole time and have not been marching in the streets and have not been saying, "Hey, you know what? There are good Muslims and bad Muslims. We need to be the first ones in the recruitment office lining up to shoot the bad Muslims in the head." I'm telling you, with God as my witness... human beings are not strong enough, unfortunately, to restrain themselves from putting up razor wire and putting you on one side of it.... When people become hungry, when people see that their way of life is on the edge of being over, they will put razor wire up and just based on the way you look or just based on your religion, they will round you up. Is that wrong? Oh my gosh, it is Nazi, World War II wrong, but society has proved it time and time again: It will happen.**

Beck had made earlier allusions to putting Muslims in concentration camps, predicting in 2006 (**Glenn Beck**, 9/5/06): "In 10 years, Muslims and Arabs will be looking through a razor wire fence at the West."

Beck has asked Muslim guests to distinguish themselves from Islamic terrorists. "I mean, you're reasonable," he said to Sharida McKenzie, organizer of a Muslim Peace March (**Glenn Beck**, 10/4/07). "How do we know the difference between you and those that are trying to kill us?"

When Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to Congress, appeared on his show (**Glenn Beck**, 11/14/06), Beck said: “I have been nervous about this interview with you, because what I feel like saying is, ‘Sir, prove to me that you are not working with our enemies.’” Beck added: “I’m not accusing you of being an enemy, but that’s the way I feel, and I think a lot of Americans will feel that way.”

Commenting on **ABC News (Good Morning America, 5/23/07)** on a Pew Research Center public opinion poll of American Muslims, which, according to Pew’s report (“American Muslims: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream,” 5/22/07) showed “absolute levels of support for Islamic extremism among Muslim Americans are quite low, especially when compared with Muslims around the world,” Beck stated that the findings showed that “the seeds of destruction are being planted.”

Although Beck apologized for the remark (**Reliable Sources, 3/18/07**), he continues to display anti-Muslim sentiment on his radio and television programs, through his magazine **Fusion** and as an occasional source on **ABC News**.

## **Debbie Schlusel**

Debbie Schlusel may tout herself to her fan club as the “greatest sexy, blonde and beautiful commentator,” but her Islamophobic rhetoric is as ugly as the rest.

Schlusel jumped to the erroneous conclusion (**Debbie Does Politics, 4/16/07**) that a “Paki” was responsible for the Virginia Tech shooting. (She remarked that “even if it does not turn out that the shooter is Muslim, this is a demonstration to Muslim jihadists all over that it is extremely easy to shoot and kill multiple American college students.”) When Sen. Barack Obama’s campaign team prevented two Muslim women from sitting behind him during a speech (see Islamophobia Election piece, page 25), Schlusel asserted (**Debbie Does Politics, 6/19/08**) that they were “Muslim Terror Front-Group Activists” (One of them faced this accusation because she held a position at the University of Michigan-Dearborn Muslim Students Association.)

Claiming a “unique expertise on radical Islam/Islamic terrorism” (**DebbieSchlusel**), Schlusel presents America as being in “the war of our lives with Islam,” and depicts the American Muslim community as a dangerous fifth column. She has asserted (**FrontPage Magazine, 2/10/05**) that “**Fox’s 24... actually tells the truth about Islamic terrorists**”:

**They are here on our shores, pretending to be loyal Americans, and they are plotting to take over our country. With the help of plenty of complicit Muslim-Americans, working for the government and government contractors.**

A resident of the Detroit area, which has large Muslim and Arab populations, she wrote immediately after the September 11 attacks (9/17/01): “Don’t blame federal agents for Tuesday’s lapse in national security. Blame my neighbors--the Arab-American and Muslim leaders who’ve actively blocked the fight against terrorism for years.”

Schlusel (**DebbieSchlusel, 11/13/07**) has raised national security concerns about Muslims being employed in certain fields, and having access to public resources that would allow them to teach their own children Arabic:

**As long as we continue to hire Muslims to be translators and analysts, as long as we continue to give money to Arabic and Muslim schools to teach their kids Arabic instead of non-Muslim, non-Arab Americans, as long as the FBI (and ICE) continues to turn down Sephardic Jews and Maronite Lebanese Christians who speak Arabic and who've applied for jobs in favor of extremist Muslims... the result we will get is... spies, spies and more spies.**

She has also questioned (12/18/06) "Barack Hussein Obama's" patriotism based on his father being born Muslim.

Schluskel's columns have been published by the **Wall Street Journal** (6/24/05), the **New York Post**, and the **Jerusalem Post**. She has appeared on **Fox News**, **CNN**, **ABC**, **Howard Stern** and **ESPN**, and, in 2002-03, her own radio show on a **CBS**-owned Detroit station. Her blog **Debbie Does Politics** appears on the websites **Townhall.com** and **PoliticalUSA.com**, she has also been quoted by Rush Limbaugh and in the **New York Times**, **Wall Street Journal**, **Washington Post**, **Newsweek**, **Rolling Stone** and **USA Today**.

## **Islamofascism:**

### **A fringe term goes mainstream, with a little help from the media**

The term “Islamofascism” came into common use after the September 2001 attacks as a favorite way for neoconservatives to describe the ideology of extremist and violent groups such as Al-Qaeda that claim to act in the name of Islam.

A search of the Nexis database shows just two mentions of the term before 2001, both in British media. The first (**Independent**, 9/8/90) came in a remark by writer Malise Ruthven about governments in predominantly Islamic countries: “Authoritarian government, not to say ‘Islamofascism,’ is the rule rather than the exception from Morocco to Pakistan.” (Ironically, considering the term’s current usage, most of these authoritarian governments--including Morocco and Pakistan--were backed by the U.S. at the time.) The second mention (**Independent**, 10/6/90) came in a response criticizing Ruthven for coining the term.

Since 2001, use of the expression has exploded. That year, according to a search of major English-language papers in the Nexis database, the word and its variant “Islamofascist” appeared 12 times, nearly all in reference to Al-Qaeda. The next year that number rose to 69, and it reached 92 in 2003 as the word’s definition began expanding to include Saddam Hussein’s historically non-religious and somewhat ecumenical Baathist regime. (As an example, Tariq Aziz, Hussein’s familiar spokesperson, was a Christian.)

The word’s prevalence continued to increase in 2005, the year George W. Bush used it in a speech to the National Endowment for Democracy (10/6/05), and in 2006 it appeared 594 times in major papers. David Horowitz’s “Islamofascism Awareness Week” (IFAW)--organized on about a hundred college campuses in October 2007--was a sign that the term had fully arrived in some right-wing circles, though not all conservatives seemed to entirely understand the message it is supposed to convey. At Michigan State University, the campus chapter of Young Americans for Freedom invited a bona fide fascist--Nick Griffin, the head of the racist British National Party--to speak on how Europe is becoming “Eurabia” (**Spartan Spectator** blog, 10/22/07). The embarrassment caused Horowitz (**InsideHigherEd.com**, 10/29/07) to disavow an event that, as far as content was concerned, promised to differ little from IFAW’s official proceedings.

In defending the term, the **New York Times**’ William Safire, former op-ed columnist and current “On Language” columnist, wrote (10/1/06), “Islamofascism may have legs: The compound defines those terrorists who profess a religious mission while embracing totalitarian methods and helps separate them from devout Muslims who want no part of terrorist means.”

But the term does precisely the opposite, say critics, linking an entire religion to the violent and intolerant actions of a minority claiming to act in its name.

Many scholars dismiss “Islamofascism” as little more than a political slogan that “War on Terror” proponents use to play on emotions by invoking odious historical enemies. As former Clinton security advisor and Center for Strategic and International Studies fellow Daniel Benjamin put it in a **BBC** interview (8/12/06):

**There is no sense in which jihadists embrace fascist ideology as it was developed by Mussolini or anyone else who was associated with the term....This is an epithet, a**

**way of arousing strong emotion and tarnishing one's opponent, but it doesn't tell us anything about the content of their beliefs.**

Niall Ferguson, the right-leaning Harvard historian, points out the term's role in Western propagandizing against the latest enemies in the large and disparate Islamic world. According to Ferguson (Interviewed for Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley's "Conversations with History" series, 10/19/06), Islamofascism is

**a completely misleading concept. In fact, there's virtually no overlap between the ideology of Al Qaeda and fascism. It's just a way of making us feel that we're the "greatest generation" fighting another World War, like the war our fathers and grandfathers fought. You're translating a crisis symbolized by 9/11 into a sort of pseudo-World War II. So 9/11 becomes Pearl Harbor, and then you go after the bad guys who are the fascists, and if you don't support us, then you must be an appeaser.**

As the term has been increasingly criticized, its use in the media has dropped, with 328 occurrences in 2007 and a pace that will barely break 200 so far in 2008. In April 2008, the White House thought better of the term, deciding it would no longer use it, along with "Jihadist" and other similar expressions. The administration explained (**Associated Press**, 4/24/08), "Such words may actually boost support for radicals among Arab and Muslim audiences by giving them a veneer of religious credibility or by causing offense to moderates."

All true, but there is also the problem of double standards--a theme that runs deep in any investigation of Islamophobia. **Boston Globe** columnist James Carrol put it well in a column about politicians using the term (1/21/08):

**The pairing of "Islam" and "fascism" has no parallel in characterizations of extremisms tied to other religions, although the defining movements of fascism were linked to Catholicism--indirectly under Benito Mussolini in Italy, explicitly under Francisco Franco in Spain. Protestant and Catholic terrorists in Northern Ireland, both deserving the label "fascist," never had their religions prefixed to that word. Nor have Hindu extremists in India, nor Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka.**

Carrol adds, "The point is that there is a deep religious prejudice at work, and when politicians adopt its code, they make it worse." Journalists would do well to heed these words as well.

## Daniel Pipes' Witch Hunt at a Public School

In September 2007, the Khalil Gibran International Academy, named for the noted Lebanese Christian poet, became the country's first public school focused on Arabic language and culture.

According to the New York Department of Education (**Brooklyn Eagle**, 7/30/07) the school was using "the same curriculum packages as other New York City public schools," and the chancellor of schools emphasized (**Christian Science Monitor**, 6/1/07) that its curriculum would be subject to departmental monitoring as with any other public school.

In short, according to New York schools chancellor Joel Klein, it was not so different from the 60-plus other dual language schools already operating in New York.

However, months before it opened its doors in Brooklyn, N. Y. the school came under fire from detractors who preemptively accused it of "imbuing pan-Arabism and anti-Zionism, proselytizing for Islam, and promoting Islamist sympathies" (**New York Sun**, 4/24/07). Charges were led by the **New York Sun** and its writer Daniel Pipes (see page 8), a conservative Mideast historian who runs the Middle East Forum and Campus Watch.

Pipes sits on the advisory board of the Stop the Madrassa Coalition (**New York Times**, 4/28/08), created, according to the coalition's blog (4/29/08), to end the "'soft jihad'...infiltrating our schools." Although "madrassa" is Arabic for "school," KGIA opponents used it to mean "a religious school" that would "impose a radical Islamic agenda in its classrooms" (**CNN**, 9/4/07).

Pipes has long argued that "Arabic-language instruction is inevitably laden with pan-Arabist and Islamist baggage" (**New York Sun**, 4/24/07), and fellow **Sun** writer Alicia Colon wrote (5/1/07) that this "pandering to multiculturalism" must have "delighted Osama bin Laden." She then called on her readers to "break out the torches and surround City Hall to stop this monstrosity."

Special abuse was reserved for Debbie Almontaser, the school's main founder who was also chosen to be its first principal. A prominent member of New York's Arab-American community, Almontaser earned praise for her work forging interfaith and interethnic alliances (**New York Times**, 4/28/08), but that history was omitted when right-wing media painted her as "a classic 'stealth Islamist'" (**Weekly Standard**, 4/11/08) with "an Islamist/leftist agenda" (**Pipe Line News**, 4/19/07).

Almontaser was further characterized by Pipes (**New York Sun**, 4/28/07) as a September 11 apologist in connection to her statement, "I don't recognize the people who committed the attacks as either Arabs or Muslims." Pipes failed to include Almontaser's following sentence (**New York Times**, 8/29/07): "Those people who did it have stolen my identity as an Arab and stolen my religion."

Attacks on Almontaser intensified after the **New York Post** reported (8/6/07) that she had "downplayed the significance" of a T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase "Intifada NYC." The shirt was produced by the group Arab Women Active in Art and Media, a youth media group that shares office space with an organization on whose advisory board Almontaser sits. When asked about the use of the word "intifada," Almontaser explained to the **Post** that it literally means a "shaking off," as of oppression, and that she doubted the girls were attempting to incite violence.

The **Post** began its article: "Activists with ties to the principal... are hawking T-shirts that glorify Palestinian terror," and the following day (8/7/07) concluded that "the hijab-wearing principal... has

issued a fatwa against the kids of New York.” “Why would this principal defend T-shirts celebrating a Palestinian uprising that has seen suicide bombers killing hundreds and hundreds of innocent Jews?” asked Rich Lowry, guest host on **Hannity & Colmes (Fox News Channel, 8/10/07)**.

In August 2007, as a result of the media onslaught, Almontaser resigned. She has subsequently said that she was forced to do so and is now suing the city of New York. The case is still pending, but in a ruling that denied her request to prevent the Department of Education from hiring a new principal, Judge Jon O. Newman concluded (**New York Times, 4/28/08**): “This was a situation where she was subject to sanction not for anything she said, not for anything she did, but because a newspaper reporter twisted what she said, and the result of it was negative press for the city and the Board of Ed.”

## Michelle Malkin Cooks Up Terrorist Donuts

Even the world of celebrity fashion is not spared by the Islamophobic smear machine.

In May 2008, right-wing blogger Michelle Malkin (see page 12) accused celebrity chef Rachael Ray of sporting a “regular adornment of Muslim terrorists” (**Town Hall**, 5/28/08) in a Dunkin’ Donuts ad. In the ad, Ray wore a black-and-white scarf resembling a keffiyeh, a traditional item of Arab clothing. Malkin characterized Ray’s scarf as a “jihadi chic keffiyeh” and a symbol of “murderous Palestinian jihad” (**MichelleMalkin.com**, 5/23/08; **Town Hall**, 5/28/08).

Actually, as anthropologist Ted R. Swedenburg of the University of Arkansas noted (**NationalPost.com**, 11/07), “Historically, the keffiyeh was an unremarkable, very conventional clothing customarily worn over the head by Palestinian and other Arabs to protect their head and sometimes their faces from the elements.” While it does have associations with the “current Palestinian situation,” Swedenburg said, “to say it is a symbol of terrorism is to say that all Palestinians are terrorists.”

Yet a symbol of terrorism was precisely what Malkin turned this common article of Arab clothing into (**Town Hall**, 5/28/08): “Popularized by Yasser Arafat and a regular adornment of Muslim terrorists appearing in beheading and hostage-taking videos, the apparel has been mainstreamed by both ignorant (and not-so-ignorant) fashion designers, celebrities and left-wing icons.” The blog **Little Green Footballs** (5/23/08) published a post headlined “Mainstreaming Terrorism to Sell Donuts.”

Meanwhile, back in the real world, the scarf was not even a keffiyeh, but the campaign still cowed its target into submission. Dunkin’ Donuts announced in a statement (**Boston Globe**, 5/28/08): “In a recent online ad, Rachael Ray is wearing a black-and-white silk scarf with a paisley design. It was selected by her stylist for the advertising shoot. Absolutely no symbolism was intended. However, given the possibility of misperception, we are no longer using the commercial.”

Malkin responded (5/28/08): “It’s refreshing to see an American company show sensitivity to the concerns of Americans opposed to Islamic jihad and its apologists.” Others might find a word other than “refreshing” to characterize pulling an ad because it was mistakenly thought to include a clothing item associated with a particular ethnic group.

## “Secret Muslims,” Open Bigotry:

### Islamophobia in the 2008 presidential campaign

In the 1990 Polish elections a whispering campaign suggesting Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Roman Catholic, was a “secret Jew” attracted widespread attention in the U.S. press, as did a nearly identical rumor about the leading challenger in Poland’s 1995 election. In no uncertain terms, U.S. news reports called the rumors “ugly examples” (**Washington Post**, 12/31/90) of the “increasingly visible expressions of anti-Semitism” (**New York Times**, 1/21/91), the most notable such “anti-Semitic acts” in Poland (**Washington Post**, 7/8/95).

U.S. media rejoiced that such religious intolerance did not characterize Americans, as an **Atlanta Journal-Constitution** op-ed explained (5/23/91):

**For all the current debate over diversity in American culture, it’s important to recognize how thoroughly imbued we are with this classically liberal view of citizenship. We do not divide ourselves into “true ethnic Americans” and those of other “nations.” People of all races, religions and national origins are, we believe, fully entitled to the name American.**

**Washington Post** columnist Richard Cohen (11/16/90) explained the persistence of the false rumor that the Polish candidate was secretly a Jew as an expression of “Poland’s peculiar cultural virus,” remarking, “What are facts when contrasted with prejudice?” Cohen described such an affair as a measure of “a country’s moral temperature, of gauging its character and its ability to deal rationally with its problems instead of setting off down the road, club in hand, in the search for scapegoats.”

It seems Poland’s “cultural virus” is not *that* peculiar. Despite the self-congratulatory words, the American campaign of 2008, like Poland in 1990, has seen Democratic candidate Barack Obama targeted by a relentless campaign suggesting he is a member of a religious minority--not a secret Jew, but a secret Muslim.

Beyond a whisper campaign, the targeting of Obama is happening in the open--in online magazines (**Insight**, 1/17/07; **Human Events**, 3/20/07; **FrontPageMag.com**, 1/7/08), on right-wing talk radio shows (**Rush Limbaugh**, 1/19/08; **Savage Nation**, 9/8/08), even in hardcover (Jerome Corsi’s *Obama Nation*, published by CBS’s Simon & Schuster in 2008). Those calling Obama a Muslim clearly see the term as a pejorative and have a sense that the “charge” will resonate with their audiences and with a significant slice of the American electorate.

So far, it seems as though they may be on to something. A Pew Research Center poll (6/18-29/08; reported 7/15/08) found that 12 percent of both Democrats and Republicans reported having the erroneous belief, while 10 percent of all voters profess to not knowing his religion because they’ve “heard different things” about it. Fifty-two percent of respondents who knew Obama was a Christian intended to vote for him, versus 37 percent of those who mistakenly believed he was Muslim.

But with few exceptions, media have not reacted nearly as forcefully to the bigotry behind the rumor campaign on their own turf as they did when the tactic was tried in Poland. Instead, journalists often accepted the idea that there was something suspicious or bad about being Muslim by referring to the canard as a “smear” (**New York Times**, 1/17/08; **ABC News**, 12/5/07), an “unsubstantiated charge” (**Washington Post**, 6/28/08), or an example of “nasty and false attacks” (**New York Times**, 1/17/08).

For NPR’s Alison Stewart (**Bryant Park Project**, 1/29/08), the rumor that Obama had attended an

Islamic school as a child in Indonesia “sounded like a page out of the Lyndon Johnson smear of Barry Goldwater in 1964.” Stewart was referring to Johnson’s 1964 TV campaign ad suggesting that President Goldwater would launch a nuclear war. In other words, according to Stewart’s analogy, the suggestion that you attended an Islamic school is tantamount to the claim that you are likely to blow up the planet.

While the **Post**’s Cohen devoted two entire columns to Obama’s “pastor problem”--first (1/15/08) asking where Obama’s “sense of outrage” was over his pastor Jeremiah Wright’s “praise for an anti-Semitic demagogue” (Louis Farrakhan), and then, after Obama denounced Farrakhan’s comments, asking (3/18/08) why it took so long--he has given the anti-Muslim rumor campaign against Obama a mere two sentences (4/22/08, 7/1/08).

In this context, it’s not surprising that the number of Muslims running for political office in the U.S. is declining from its already small number, according to the American Muslim Alliance (**Chicago Tribune**, 6/30/06). In 2000, some 700 Muslims (out of a population of more than 2 million, Pew, 5/22/07) ran for office in the U.S.--a figure that plummeted 90 percent to just 70 in 2002 and had only crept up to 100 by 2004.

With the Islamophobic premise behind the rumor campaign going largely unquestioned, Muslims have been repeatedly shunned in the 2008 race. One glaring example was at a campaign event in Detroit where Obama staff took two women wearing hijabs, traditional head scarves, out of the view of TV cameras--a clear message, as one of the women put it (**Politico**, 6/18/08), that “they do not want him associated with Muslims or Muslim supporters.” (The Obama campaign later apologized for relocating the women.)

Later that month, the Obama campaign started a website called “Fight the Smears” to, “among other things, debunk portrayals of Obama as a Muslim” (**International Herald Tribune**, 6/30/08). Just a month later, a website (**Muslim Brotherhood Watch**, 7/31/08, 8/1/08) alleged that Obama’s Muslim Outreach Coordinator Mazen Asbahi’s past involvement with the Ann Arbor Muslim Students Association, and his serving on the board of an Islamic trust--a role he had held for a few weeks eight years earlier--constituted ties to the U.S. Muslim Brotherhood. Shortly after this online “exposé,” the **Wall Street Journal** (8/6/08) pointed out that an imam who was a past member of the Islamic trust board had been charged in a State Department investigation of alleged racketeering and fundraising for Hamas, a case that ended in a mistrial. Asbahi had resigned from the board after hearing of the charges against his fellow board member, yet this tenuous association was enough to prompt Asbahi to resign from the Obama campaign in anticipation of the distraction the media coverage would create.

Much has been made in the media about the unknown origins of some of the anti-Muslim rumors about Obama. The **Washington Post** (6/28/08), for instance, published a lengthy investigation of these email rumors under the headline “An Attack That Came Out of the Ether,” and **CNN**’s Joe Johns (**CNN Newsroom**, 7/15/08) has described the rumors that Obama is a Muslim as originating from “the dark side of the Internet.”

Islamophobia in the current election cycle may have started in “the ether,” but the record shows it has run into too little resistance from media and political elites, who have done too little to reject it and, in some cases, served to advance it.