

FEARING THE “OTHER” IS POLITICALLY PROFITABLE: IRAN, ISLAMO-FASCISM AND THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

by *Racialicious* special correspondent [Latoya Peterson](#)



The whispers about Iran are starting to become more numerous to ignore. The same whispers continue in hushed tones about Islamo-Fascism, hatred of freedom, and the need to do something.

Do what, I wonder? Bomb more people?

But the whispers grow in volume every day. So, to try to make sense of it all, I began to read.

I read an interesting Q & A on [Pop & Politics](#) about Islamo-Fascism.

(Fabulous moment of semi-irony: David Horowitz defending Ann Coulter by saying “Why should anybody in America, whose democratic culture is based on the pluralism of ideas, be offended by a religious belief?” Yes, David, why should they be offended by a religious belief? And why would they decide to be actively offensive toward those who hold other beliefs?)

This appeared the same day I read a Washington Post hosted chat about a PBS program I missed on the whole Iran situation.

Pop and Politics has also been covering some of the issues surrounding some of this othering and the issues surrounding the Bush Administration’s newest target - Iran:

In [the Path to Iran](#), Chris Nelson briefly summarizes Seymour M. Hirsch’s article on the Bush Administration and the next target:

In sum, the war in Iraq is now being redefined— years too late and for ulterior motives— as in fact a strategic conflict with Iran. But blaming Iran for the humiliating U.S. failure in Iraq is merely the latest rhetorical approach to persuade Americans of the need to bomb Tehran, according to Hirsch.

In another post, P & P discussed one of Ann Coulter’s recent speaking engagements in honor of [Islamofascism Awareness week](#):

Ann Coulter descended on USC campus to promote her new book last week as part of the David Horowitz Freedom Center’s “Islamofascism Awareness Week.” While speaking to a crowd of about

230 fans at the Annenberg School, she offered equal doses of anti-liberal tirade and inflammatory discourse on the world beyond these amber waves of grain.

...

“Eschewing debate, I would turn to inflicting horrible physical pain. That seems to change people’s minds,” Coulter said when asked during the Q&A if she believed that “very vigorous intellectual debate could perhaps change [Islamofascists]’s views against using violence to spread religion?”

“Who would have thought the Japanese were governable? A few well-placed nuclear bombs and they’ve been gentle little lambs ever since,” was how she followed-up the “horrible physical pain” plan for Islamofascists.

...

She is a massively efficient, sound-byte spewing, ideologue.

[O]ne of her adoring fans, who were omnipresent at Annenberg (the Young Republicans, who sponsored the event, must have chosen their guest-list wisely), asked her if she thought the facts of her speeches got lost in the heat of her rhetoric.

“No,” she said smugly.

While David Horowitz calls Ann Coulter a “brilliant political satirist,” it becomes frighteningly obvious that there are some who take her opinions seriously:

...[W]hat caught her off-guard was the overwhelmingly conservative crowd that greeted her. Seems that receiving a standing-o at a college appearance is not exactly par for the course. Instead of being tossed barbs by left-leaning questioners, she was asked sincere questions by supporters who simply wanted to know more about the topic she purportedly came to speak on.

She couldn’t cite any figures when asked “What percent of the world population of Muslims [could be called Islamofascist] ?” by a man who simply wanted to “get a clearer idea of the extent of the terrorist problem throughout the world.”

“I couldn’t talk about specific numbers. I don’t know off the top of my head... what I can tell you is generally way too many. That’s the answer. Way too many.”

Hmm. Thanks, Ann.

When asked “Why is it that the media and the president are turning a blind eye to the Assyrian population in Iraq?” The Assyrians are the indigenous Christians of Iraq. Coulter: “Oh yes, I’ve heard about this and I have no idea. I do not know what the answer is.”

Asked twice by a reporter for the university newspaper to define fascism, she floundered. The first time she offered a roundabout response that mentioned Communism, Nazism, and nihilism, saying it was the “total control of people’s lives” and so in this respect “every government is to some extent fascist.” As unsatisfied as everyone else in the room, the reporter, reminding her that she was invited to speak for Islamo-Fascism week, pressed again for a definition. Visibly uncomfortable or perturbed, she told him to consult a dictionary.

More than unprepared, she seemed uninterested. Christopher Hitchens, for example, hasn’t shied away from the pretty basic and important question.

Alas, Coulter managed to steer the discussion back to her interests. She used “homosexuality” and “sodomy” interchangeably when answering a question about Ahmadinejad and Iranian homosexuals. She then suggested we repeal the portion of the Constitution that grants citizenship to people born in the U.S. so that a pregnant Mexican woman doesn’t hop across the border with “a lifetime of free welfare checks” in her belly. Then she insisted that most gender and race activist groups are “a front for the Democratic Party.”

If there is one thing Ms. Coulter has mastered, it’s the ability to divide and polarize to the point of rendering opinionated discourse irrelevant.

All this discussion about Iran and Islam is not a mistake. I am starting to think that the two are conflated for a reason - to create fear in the American psyche and drum up a little more grudging support for yet another act of aggression.

Unfortunately, I think that it is working.

Faced with a media vacuum about Persian culture, Americans are susceptible to believing just about anything the media presents on this topic. We simply do not know enough about that is going on in Iran - or the Middle East in general - to separate out facts from propaganda.

From the [dramatic photo of Laura Bush](#) (taken in the UAE, by the way, not Iran) to the Time cover Manish [just posted about](#) (which features Pakistan) these strong, salient images are melding into one pulsing message:

It’s America against these violent others.

They hate our freedom times infinity!

I sit and I read and I watch. And this worries me. This melding of other countries as all the same, the similarity in reporting style and images presented, the hype accorded to Islamic terrorists in the Middle East and other areas of the world is culminating in a very strong image that can be twisted to the advantage of any political appointee with a jingoistic bend.

I am worried.

And I am worried because the message has started to take hold in me as well. As a person who is generally skeptical of mainstream media, who feels no immediate threat from Muslims, who understands a little - but not a lot - about the many facets of Islam as a religion, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that some of those messages started to take root.

I read the Wired feature on the [terrorist hunter mom](#) and grew concerned.

Then I read some of the quotes from the article. A sample:

Rossmiller took language from Mohammed Atta's favorite poem and included it in some of her flowery posts. She got a lot of hits and replies, so she's been laying down the purple prose ever since. "I would change and tailor it to what I needed," she says. She knew that Arabic communication and speech often quote the Koran, so she would page through it, learning the stories and noting suitable verses. "These are handy little things to adjust for different occasions," she says, "like Hallmark cards for jihad."

I read that wondering, WTF? The Holy Koran got condensed down to "Hallmark cards for jihad?" My general skepticism kicked in, pushing any "Should I be more concerned about Islamic Terrorism?" thoughts to the back of my mind. But thousands of other people have read this article, and are probably thinking the same thing - holy shit, this is real.

Obviously, the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are real. But, to me, the evidence for both wars was based on flimsy pretexts at best. With Afghanistan, we came for Osama Bin Laden and left leaving a trail of destruction in our wake. Americans callously cheered shock and awe, sparing no thought to the human casualties. The move into Iraq felt like a windmill from the start, a way to settle an old score conveniently.

Iran frightens me because it feels different. It appears that they are actually going to try to make a case for this one. To actually provide evidence. To stoke the fires of anti-American sentiment, and broadcast it in "best of" segments on the nightly news. You read the story of the woman in Wired and realize that not only is she terrorist-hunting, but she is helping to actually stop acts of terrorism and locate key participants...like other Americans.

I am deeply unsettled. I promise myself that I will become better educated, that I will read more books on historical conflicts and flimsy alliances. But in the meantime, I just watch TV. I read the news. I see no representations of Islam outside of violent proselytizing. I hear my Christian friends start to pay more attention to Islam and begin drawing their personal lines in the sand. I hear more simplified rhetoric, see more images of people waiting for America's downfall. I worry.

I googled "Islamofascism Week" and saw many sites in support. I saw mentions of controversy over the week from Harvard, NPR, and a few other news sites. But I did not see anything to create Islamic

awareness. Nothing challenging the idea of Islamo-Fascism. No easily accessible place to receive information about Islam or the influences or differing perspectives.

I wonder if Americans have already bought the idea that Islamo-Fascism is a threat to our lifestyle and we are just working out the details on how to deal with it.

I wonder if there is going to be a voice of sanity to arise out of this, to explain what is actually happening, to initiate honest discussions on theocracies, sovereignty of nations, and demystifying the region so we can stop lumping The Middle East-Pakistan-Iraq-Iran-Afghanistan together as a mass and understand the specific issues in each respective country.

I wonder...

I watch...

I wait.