

## Roger Ebert's Moral and Intellectual Bankruptcy: 10 Ridiculous Statements Supporting Cordoba House

Posted By [Walter Hudson](#) On August 24, 2010 @ 8:00 am In [Defining the Left](#),[Email](#),[Fairness Doctrine / Removing Conservatives from the Airwaves](#),[Feature](#),[First Amendment/Free Speech](#),[Hollywood](#),[Islamic Groups in the U.S.](#),[Politics](#),[Radical Islam](#),[Sarah Palin](#),[The Concession Stand](#),[War on Terror](#) | [2 Comments](#)

Here at The Concession Stand, **NRB's** pop culture division, we are sustained by a steady stream of boneheaded remarks from celebrities grand and small. One of the gifts that keeps on giving is *Chicago-Sun Times* film critic turned political pseudo-blogger [Roger Ebert](#).

Ebert was recognized by the National Society of Newspaper Columnists as one of the [best bloggers of 2010](#) for his "clarity and depth." Such an accolade is [laughable](#) when you objectively consider [an average Ebert post](#). Far from deep or clear, a typical Ebert rant is a long piece of well crafted gibberish.

In his most recent post, "[Ten things I know about the mosque](#)," Ebert takes on opponents of the Cordoba House project near ground zero of the 9/11 attacks. In usual Ebert fashion, his post lacks an overall thesis and wanders aimlessly between several barely related thoughts. In light of this stream-of-consciousness writing style, answering Ebert requires point-by-point refutation. Hence, here are ten things I know better than Roger Ebert.

### 10) The Mosque Controversy Has Nothing to Do With Constitutional Rights

1. America missed a golden opportunity to showcase its Constitutional freedoms. The instinctive response of Americans should have been the same as President Obama's: Muslims have every right to build there. Where one religion can build a church, so can all religions.

I won't hit Ebert too hard on this point, because his inability to distinguish an argument over propriety from an argument over rights is unfortunately common. We see it from the Left in their advocacy of [net neutrality](#) or any other reimagining of the fairness doctrine. To such minds, the fact the market does not support certain speech means the speaker's freedom of speech has been violated. In truth, no one is entitled to a venue or an audience, or to a neutral or positive reception. Freedom of speech means you don't get fined or jailed for speaking your mind, not that you get to say whatever you want without social consequence.

Likewise, freedom of religion means you don't get fined or thrown in jail for being a Muslim, or a Christian, or whatever you choose to be. It does not mean you get to act in any manner you see fit so long as you can loosely tie it to some religious conviction.

The real opportunity missed was President Obama's. When he opted to insert himself into the debate, he had an opportunity to demonstrate statesmanship by applying his expertise in constitutional law to the craft of a scholarly statement on federalism and the true nature of religious freedom in America. Instead, like Ebert, Obama choose the sophomoric approach and spoke to a strawman.

In fact, contrary to Ebert's implication, religious freedom does not mean building a house of worship wherever you like. States have plenary police power, and local governments are within their rights to zone and enforce building codes. Indeed, such red tape has [kept Christians from rebuilding a church destroyed on 9/11](#).

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America accused New York officials on Tuesday of turning their backs on the reconstruction of the only church destroyed in the Sept. 11 attacks, while the controversial mosque near Ground Zero moves forward.

The sidelined project is the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, a tiny, four-story building destroyed in 2001 when one of the World Trade Center towers fell on top of it. Nobody from the church was hurt in the attack, but the congregation has for the past eight years been trying to rebuild its house of worship.

While the mosque project cleared red tape earlier this month, negotiations between the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the church stalled last year — and will not be revived, according to government officials...

Where are Obama and Ebert on the "religious freedom" of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese?

## 9) The First Amendment Is a Limitation Upon Congress, Not a License For Any Given Activity

2. The First Amendment comes down to this: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." It does not come down to: "The First Amendment gives me the right to repeat the N-word 11 times on the radio to an inoffensive black woman, and when you attack me for saying it, you are in violation of my First Amendment rights."

Forgetting for the moment this has nothing to do with the Cordoba House project (in a post entitled "Ten things I know about the mosque"), this is perhaps the most laughable of Ebert's statements. In the same proverbial breath, he misrepresents the First Amendment as an obligation to defend all speech while condemning speech he does not like.

Ebert here references [the N-word controversy](#) which ended the career of talk radio icon Laura Schlessinger. Ironically, he picks a perfect example for demonstrating how he and Obama are wrong to evoke "religious freedom" in defense of Cordoba House.

Again, what Ebert is missing is the distinction between a right and a good idea. The First Amendment ensures Schlessinger will not spend time behind bars for uttering an offensive word. It does not entitle her to continue uttering that word without consequence. If her sponsors, listeners, and affiliate stations abandon her, that does not violate her free speech rights.

Ebert obviously gets that, but just as clearly cannot derive the universal principle applicable to Cordoba House. Whether [Imam Feisal Rauf](#) has the right to practice his religion is not contingent upon his ability to build a mosque two blocks from ground zero. It is certainly not contingent upon whether other people approve of it.

## Discernment Is Not Hatred

3. The choice of location shows flawed judgment on the part of its imam, Feisal Abdul Rauf. He undoubtedly knows that now, and I expect his project to be relocated. The imam would be prudent to chose another location, because the far right wing has seized on the issue as an occasion for fanning hatred against Muslims. It has also narrowly reframed the project as a mosque, rather than a community center with a prayer room, which is what it would be. To oppose it on the grounds that it is Muslim is religious prejudice and nothing else. The Muslims who attacked the World Trade Center are not the Muslims who are building the center.

What a rollercoaster ride that statement is. For a moment, it seems Ebert might concede that Rauf's choice of location is insensitive. Unfortunately, that's not Ebert's point at all though. For Ebert, the flaw in Rauf's judgment is underestimating the "far right wing" capacity for "fanning hatred against Muslims." Therefore, the only "prudent" reason for choosing another location for the mosque is to protect Muslims from rabid conservatives, not to demonstrate decency and grace.

To the argument over semantics, no one is confused regarding what Cordoba House is. No matter how many pools or basketball courts are installed, it's not a YMCA. There is no amount of euphemism which will affect the public perception that this is a mosque, mostly because that's what it is.

None of the above is as troublesome as Ebert's blanket statement that opposition to Islam is religious prejudice, not to mention his attempt to dismiss the 9/11 hijackers as some aberration. If you want to talk about prejudice as an objective concept and not just a rhetorical device, the American instinct is clearly to prejudge Islam as a religion of peace. Scant and rejected are those with the tenacity to question Islam. It is far safer to blindly accept the "hijacked faith" routine.

It is only once informed of the inner workings of the faith — its history, its tradition, and its current practice throughout the globe — that one begins to shake the prejudice of naiveté and discern the threat Islam poses. Surely, Ebert's observation that the Muslims who attacked the World Trade Center are not the Muslims who are building this mosque is technically accurate. It is also an answer

to an assertion no one is making. The real question is just how true to the Muslim faith Imam Rauf is. If he is a true follower, an adherent to the faith's text and prophet, that is reason for grave concern.

Regarding the Cordoba House with suspicion is no more hateful than scrutinizing a neo-Nazi group. No matter how many times a neo-Nazi tells you they are peaceful, knowing Nazism as you do, you would tread carefully. When it comes to the infidel – particularly the Christian and the Jew – the prescription of Qur'anic Islam is Hitler's Final Solution. Standing against that is an exercise of discernment, not hatred.

## 7) Opposition to the Mosque Is Not About Obama

4. One buried motive for the attacks on Park51 is exploitation of the insane belief of 20% of Americans that President Obama is a Muslim. Zealots like Glenn Beck, with his almost daily insinuations about the Muslim grandfather Obama never knew and the father he met only once, are encouraging this mistaken belief.

This hardly deserves response. President Obama's religious affiliation is of no relevance to the Cordoba House controversy. I would love to meet one person who is upset about Cordoba House *because* they think Obama is Muslim.

Certainly, there are those who question the president's professed Christianity. While I do not focus on such speculation, I do not think it "insane." Obama surely has a greater personal connection to Islam than any other president in American history, and has demonstrated sympathy for the faith on more than one occasion. The difference between Ebert and I is he pretends to know the man's heart, and I do not.

Regardless, this is a red herring. President Obama is an entirely different subject, in spite of his choice to weigh in on the Cordoba issue.

## 6) There's No Hypocrite Quite Like a Marxist Hypocrite

5. The Bill of Rights has a parallel with pregnancy. You can't be a little pregnant, and you can't be a little free. Nor can you serve yourself from it cafeteria style.

Boy, oh boy.

Roger Ebert on economic freedom:

There's obviously only one remedy [to the BP oil spill]: An energy revolution. We must reduce consumption and develop clean energy alternatives. We try to avoid this overwhelming fact.

Roger Ebert on due process:

BP will be in the courts for years to come. It has no interest in a quick decision. It has plenty of money to throw armies of lawyers into the fight... Obama, met with those bastards and asked them to put \$20 billion in an escrow account to help pay for my damages. I was relieved and thankful, and then I listened to Fox News and the Republicans and was shocked to hear he was guilty of extortion...

Roger Ebert on freedom of speech (from this very article!):

[The First Amendment] does not come down to: "[I have] the right to repeat the N-word 11 times..."

Need I go on?

## 5) The Left Abhors Definition

6. Somewhere on the Right is an anonymous genius at creating memes. Sarah Palin floats a suspicious number of them: Death Panels, Ground Zero Mosque, 9/11 Mosque, Terror Babies. Her tweets are mine fields of coded words; for her, "patriot" is defined as, "those who agree with me." When she says "Americans," it is not inclusive. These two must have been carefully composed in advance to be tweeted within 60 seconds of each other:

By using the evocative word "shackles" she associates Dr. Laura's use of the N-word with the suffering of slaves. By implying Dr. Laura was silenced by "Constitutional obstructionists," she employs the methodology of the Big Lie, defined in *Mein Kampf* as an untruth so colossal that "no one would believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously." She uses the trigger word "reload" to evoke her support of Second Amendment activists while attacking "activists" for evoking the First.

I have no desire to defend either Sarah Palin or Laura Schlessinger in the context of the latter's N-word controversy. It is entirely off the topic of Cordoba House. Ebert goes there presumably to affect a point about language. I'm not sure what that point is, other than he doesn't like "coded words."

In truth, it seems more likely Ebert doesn't like definition, because there's nothing coded about Palin's language. "Death panels" paints an accurate picture of the function served by resource rationing boards. "Ground zero mosque" and "9/11 mosque" accurately indicate where Cordoba House is to be build, and why it is offensive.

The Left's propensity to see code words where language is plain demonstrates a childish refusal to deal in real issues. Who was it that said describing Obama as "socialist" is code language for "black?"

This tactic creates issues where none exist. Suddenly, instead of talking about Obama's apparent socialism, the conversation is about ensuring "the political dialogue has certain boundaries." Suddenly, instead of talking about the consequences of nationalized health care, or the appropriateness of building a mosque two blocks from ground zero, the conversation is about *Mein Kampf* and the N-word.

#### 4) Disagreeing Proves You Are Wrong

7. Many Americans and a great many politicians have either never taken a civics class or disagree with what they should have learned there. The major opinion sources in America that seem to devote the most attention to the Bill of Rights are Fox News, Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck, all distorting it as an everyday practice. Bill O'Reilly, to his credit, doesn't indulge in this.

What luscious arrogance. Disagreement with Ebert equals ignorance of basic civics. What can you say to that?

#### 3) Myopia: Chicken Soup for the Leftist Soul

8. A meme is infecting our society that Muslims are terrorists and hate America; they are the enemy. It is a cliché to say, "the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful," but is true. When Muslim nations are bombed by America, can those nations be expected to applaud? In Iran after 9/11 there were candlelight marches in sympathy with the United States.

You're forgiven if you've forgotten how all this started. We began talking about Cordoba House. After some detours to lob irrelevant bombs toward Laura Schlessinger, Glenn Beck, and ignorant slobes like you, Ebert erratically returns to the topic at hand.

Again, we encounter the real prejudice toward Islam, the assumption it is a peaceful religion. That the vast majority of Muslims have not taken up arms does not make them "peaceful." If I tell you my goal in life is to see a world without you in it, is that "peaceful?" If I tell you I'll tolerate your presence so long as you live in subservience to me or convert to my faith, is that "peaceful?" Last time I checked, the threat of violence was still listed among aggressive, coercive, and often illegal acts.

As something of a libertarian, I break from some of my **NRB** colleagues by advocating a relatively restrained (but by no means isolationist) foreign policy. I am sympathetic to the argument that Afghans and Iraqis and others may be hard pressed to embrace American ideals in the face of American military action. However, Ebert and his ilk take such an observation beyond its realistic origin to justify sticking their head in the sand.

Did Ebert miss the candy-tossing celebrations throughout the Muslim world in the aftermath of 9/11? Or does he think isolated candlelight vigils eclipse such blatant hatred? My guess is Ebert has completely blocked those celebrations from his memory. Myopia is an essential characteristic toward the maintenance of a leftist paradigm.

## 2) Moral Ambivalence Lends Itself Easily to Leftist Thought

9. I find hope in the words of two American strippers interviewed by the Wall Street Journal.

You read right.

Cassandra, who works at New York Dolls, just around the corner from the proposed community center, said she worried that calls to prayer might wake up the neighbors. The WSJ writes: "But when she was told that the organizers aren't planning loudspeakers, she said she didn't have a problem with the project: 'I don't know what the big deal is. It's freedom of religion, you know?'"

Chris works in the Pussycat Lounge, even closer to the site. When the airplanes struck the World Trade Center, Chris became a Red Cross volunteer working with survivors. The WSJ writes she "sat on a barstool in a tiny, shiny red dress and defended Park51. 'They're not building a mosque in the World Trade Center. It's all good. You have your synagogues and your churches. And you have a mosque.'" Chris lost eight of her friends on Sept. 11, 2001, firefighters from the Brooklyn firehouse she lived next to at the time, but "the people who did it are not going to the mosque."

Cassandra and Chris reflect American values more instinctively and correctly on this issue, let it be said, than Sarah Palin, Howard Dean, Newt Gingrich, Harry Reid and Rudy Giuliani, who should know better.

Let me take this opportunity to remind you of Ebert's selection by the National Society of Newspaper Columnists as one of the best bloggers of 2010 for his "clarity and depth." As you can see, he is certainly mining untapped sources of political philosophy. I certainly never thought to ask a stripper about Cordoba House. Of course, I never took a civics class either. Maybe that's where such innovation is taught.

This one point on Ebert's list ought to be enough for any thinking person to dismiss him. When you have to skip over Howard Dean and Harry Reid to New York City's exotic dancers in order to find supporting statements, you might be on the wrong side of an issue.

It makes a certain amount of sense that women who have settled resigned their dignity in favor of a quick buck would believe the decisive factor in the Cordoba issue to be whether there will be loudspeakers. From the start, you're dealing with an explicitly short-sighted mentality. Women who can't see past the age of 25 are probably not suited to advise the rest of us.

## 1) The Equivalent Value of Everything Is Value of Nothing

Ebert goes out with a bang, posing a dishonorable visual which demonstrates him to be utterly tone deaf:

10. I wonder how many Americans realize the community center is not intended for Ground Zero. What will be constructed there includes a 55,000 square foot retail mall. This mall will be deep enough to connect with subway lines — deep enough, that is, to theoretically be embedded in the ashes of some of the 9/11 victims.

Ebert goes on to reprint a pantheistic poem he wrote in the wake of 9/11. For him, this must seem the ideal culmination of the Cordoba debate, an affirmation of himself.

I'll spare you from it here. Suffice it to say it expresses the now common secular humanist sentiment that all things are of equal beauty and value. It makes sense Ebert would feel that way. It explains his inability to discern friend from foe, right from wrong, freedom from tyranny, and civics from consensus.

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