

World U.S. New York Business Markets Tech Personal Finance Life & Culture

Opinion Careers Real Estate Small Business

Essential Tools

WSJ Startup Calculator

Starting a business is more expensive than you might think. Have you thought through the assets you need? How about monthly expenses?

Use this startup calculator to figure out the true costs of launching a company. How much do you think it

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit www.djreprints.com

[See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)

[Order a reprint of this article now](#)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

OPINION | AUGUST 26, 2010

A Muslim Reformer on the Mosque

The warriors for tolerance and the antimosque crusaders are both wrong.

By [IRSHAD MANJI](#)

Debates across America over Islamic centers and mosques won't soon be resolved. But this summer's hysteria is giving the upper hand to one nefarious force: the culture of offense.

Election-year politics, ratings-hungry media and deep personal fear foment raw emotion. In such an environment, "I'm offended" takes on the stature of a substantive argument. Too many Americans are mistaking feeling for thinking.

That's true not just among antimosque crusaders, but also among warriors for tolerance. Consider Bob, who feels so offended by antimosque activists in his state of Tennessee that these feelings alone drive him to support more mosques—without prior thought to what, exactly, he's supporting. "I found local citizens to be intolerant and un-American," Bob tells me over email. "So as a gesture of tolerance and Americanism, I donated to the mosque building fund."



[View Full Image](#)

Associated Press

A demonstration outside of Park51 last week.

Before pledging a penny, Bob should have asked the imam: "Where will the men's side of this mosque be?" It's a discreet way of discerning whether the project will replicate segregation, and thus whether the mosque will wind up bolstering the intolerant behavior that Bob can't abide.

I am not saying that Bob should cast his lot with antimosque demonstrators. I am simply saying he should not give them the power to commandeer his brain by hijacking his heart.

Now apply this point to Park51, the proposed multistory Islamic community center and prayer space to be erected at the edge of Ground Zero. Let me be blunt about my own emotions: I am

offended by its proximity to the site of 9/11. I am also disappointed that Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf—who is not an Islamist—has nonetheless played crass politics unbecoming of a man of dialogue.

So far, the imam has rebuffed accusations of insensitivity. Yet he made those very accusations about the Danish cartoons of Prophet Muhammad. In a February 2006 press release, Imam Rauf announced that he was "appalled" by the drawings. He called it "willful fomentation" and "gratuitous" to republish them throughout

Europe. In the following weeks, almost no U.S. newspaper printed the caricatures.

Three years later, it is the imam who the majority of Americans believe is engaging in "willful fomentation." Yet his retinue has not publicly acknowledged that the feelings of these "appalled" Americans parallel how moderate Muslims such as Imam Rauf felt during the cartoon debacle.

More

[Bloomberg Defends Mosque](#)

But for all the restless offense I feel, I step back and force myself to think. As I wrestle with the issues, I realize that an opportunity exists for something more constructive than anger.

Namely, accountability. If Park51 gets built, thanks to its provocative location the nation will scrutinize what takes place inside. Americans have the opportunity right now to be clear about the civic values expected from any Islam practiced at the site.

That means setting aside bombast and asking the imam questions born of the highest American ideals: individual dignity and pluralism of ideas.

- Will the swimming pool at Park51 be segregated between men and women at any time of the day or night?
- May women lead congregational prayers any day of the week?
- Will Jews and Christians, fellow People of the Book, be able to use the prayer sanctuary for their services just as Muslims share prayer space with Christians and Jews in the Pentagon? (Spare me the technocratic argument that the Pentagon is a governmental, not private, building. Park51 may be private in the legal sense but is a public symbol par excellence.)
- What will be taught about homosexuals? About agnostics? About atheists? About apostasy?
- Where does one sign up for advance tickets to Salman Rushdie's lecture at Park51?

These questions aren't gratuitous. I, for one, remain haunted by the 300 Muslims chanting "Death to Rushdie" on Sept. 10, 2001. They gathered outside a theater in Houston, Texas, to protest a visit by the novelist—the target of a 1989 death warrant from Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini. One Muslim told reporters, "The fatwa is valid even if the Iranian government no longer supports it." Another warned, "We have not forgotten about him and his evil act." That man affiliated himself with Houston's Islamic Education Center. Education or indoctrination? The question deserves an honest response.

Through engagement that emphasizes questions like these, Americans of all faiths and no faith at all may very well make the colorful neighborhood around Ground Zero host to the most transparent, most democratic, most modern Islam—ever.

As a proud New Yorker as well as a reformist Muslim, I think, and not just feel, that this would be a fitting salute to the victims of 9/11. It would turn the tables on the freedom-hating culture of al Qaeda. And it would subvert the liberty-lashing culture of offense.

Ms. Manji, a professor of leadership at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, is at work on a new book about how to advance liberal reform within Islam.

Copyright 2009 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com