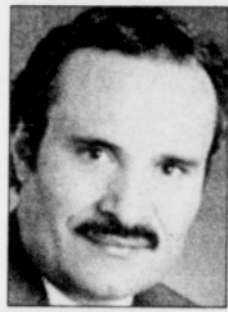


OPINION

A Hateful Piece of Propaganda

Anti-Islam film abuses free speech



BY VICANGELO BULLUCK

Havoc continues throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa ignited by the debasing stereotypes and grotesque portrayals depicted in the film, *Innocence of Islam*. The amateurish film has mushroomed into a maelstrom of disquiet throughout the Muslim World.

Not since the release of *Birth of a Nation* has a film become so inflammatory. In 1915 the NAACP led peaceful protests denouncing the film that was causing riots and lynchings across our nation.

Bloggers and Sunday morning

news commentators debate and argue about whether the *Innocence of Islam* filmmakers should be held accountable for the eruption of violence caused by the film. After all they have the right to free speech.

While we defend free speech there is a responsibility that comes with that right. In 1915 the NAACP sought injunctions against the distribution of *The Birth of a Nation* calling it a threat to public safety. So today the NAACP cannot remain silent. We must condemn this hateful destructive piece of propaganda.

The tragic loss of life reminds us not only of the volatility of closely held thoughts and beliefs but also about the power of film to influence and ignite them. History has shown

us repeatedly that media -- and most powerfully -- visual media, has a direct effect on culture and human behavior.

When *Birth of a Nation* portrayed the KKK as heroes defending white virtue, it increased the membership of the KKK and perpetuated negative stereotypes of African Americans that would last generations. Lamentably, some of these stereotypes still resonate today.

Thus, the NAACP's continuing endeavors to affect the portrayals of minorities in film and television have never been more critical, given that media giants now beam powerful images throughout the world, shaping our beliefs, opinions and decisions.

What the people of the Middle East, North Africa and around the

world need to understand is that most Americans are insulted by this film and that minorities in America continue to advocate for fair representation in the media.

So, we urge the people and the leaders of the Muslim world to protest in peace and join us in a constructive dialogue about the power of the media in shaping the world in which we all aspire to live -- a world of inclusion, understanding and tolerance.

Those living under repressive regimes must understand that freedom of speech is one of our democracy's founding principles. Conversely, we as a free people must understand the power of that speech and that we have the right and the responsibility to condemn those who would abuse it.

So, we urge those in the entertainment and communication industries to reflect on the power of the images that are created in our mass media on a daily basis. Images that were once carried in film canisters and driven over roads from theater to theater are now transported on the worldwide web by the click of a button.

In this age of new media, let's hope the messaging we have been seeing online through Facebook and YouTube from concerned Americans of every race, religion and gender will be viewed and heard by the rest of the world so that they know that we as a nation advocate and appeal for the birth of tolerance.

Vicangelo Bulluck is executive director of the Hollywood bureau of the NAACP.

How Many Lives Would Have Been Saved

A nation unwilling to curb guns that kill lots of people

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

When news broke of the murders at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin, people of all faiths and backgrounds and the first responders who came to the scene to help were horrified by the ambush on men and women as they prepared for worship services.

Leaders across the country quickly denounced the hate crime and the FBI immediately began investigating the attack as a possible case of domestic terrorism. But as easy as it was for all of us to be outraged by another senseless attack and heartbroken by the congregation's stories, it was difficult to be surprised by how it took place again in a nation unwilling to curb guns designed just to kill lots of people in the hands of lawless



people.

Would this have happened without a semi-automatic gun and high-capacity clips of bullets?

The shootings at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin last month came only two weeks after James Holmes killed 12 people and injured 58 others at a movie theater in Aurora, Colo., in one of the worst mass shootings in American history.

Would this have happened without an AR-15 assault rifle, a Remington 870 12-gauge shot gun, and a semi-automatic handgun with high-capacity clips of bullets?

Every time another mass shooting happens in the United States, the debate over gun control comes fleetingly to the forefront—until political fear paralyzes courage and action.

Inevitably, some people repeat the argument that the solution to preventing mass shootings is not better gun control laws— even control of assault weapons which have no place in nonmilitary hands—but getting even more Americans armed.

The apparent fantasy result would be something straight out of Hollywood where every single time a bad person stands up with a gun a good person with their own gun would quickly rise up out of the crowd, shoot the bad person, and save the day.

But arguments like this ignore both common sense and scientific evidence about the connection between the ready availability of guns—including assault weapons and guns with large ammunition capacity—and the epidemic of gun violence in America.

Daniel W. Webster, professor and co-director of the Center for Gun Policy and Research at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and a panelist at the Children's Defense Fund's recent conference, wrote after the Aurora shootings: "We should not brush aside discussions of gun policy as too politically difficult to expect meaningful change, or 'the price for our freedoms.' Instead, we should reflect on why the U.S. has a murder rate that is nearly seven times higher than the average murder rate in other high-income countries and a nearly 20 times higher murder

rate with guns.

Webster went on to say that studies he has conducted indicate that stricter regulations of gun sales, whether by retail dealers or by private sellers, are associated with fewer guns diverted to criminals. Moreover, he argues that national surveys show that a large majority of citizens favor these reforms to our gun laws, including most gun owners.

It is way past time for common-sense gun law reform in America. Many of the victims of mass shootings have been strangers—sometimes children—who were personally unknown to the shooters but were simply in "the wrong place at the wrong time," even if the "wrong place" turned out to be going to class, attending a worship service on a Sunday morning, or going to the local movie theater on a summer evening.

In other words, they could have been any one of us. What will it take for us to do something about it?

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

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