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Republican Perspective

By John Littig

Another Casualty of Campus Thought Police

Mohammed Bouyeri is serving a life sentence for the 2004 murder of Dutch film director Theo Van Gogh. Van Gogh had made a movie called "Submission," shown on Dutch television. Its purpose was to draw attention to the plight of Muslim women; it was unflattering to Islam and it's fair to say it was blasphemous. Bouyeri stabbed Van Gogh to death in the street. With his dagger, he then stabbed into Van Gogh's flesh a letter addressed to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, threatening to kill her as well.

A native of Somalia, Ali had suffered genital mutilation, beatings, and a forced marriage. She escaped Somalia and fled to Holland, where she found the considerable Muslim community to be insular - separate and apart from the Dutch population, dependent on welfare, implacably resistant to economic and cultural integration.

Ali obtained Dutch citizenship and renounced Islam. Beautiful and articulate, she was elected to the Dutch parliament where she served three years. She strove to assimilate the Muslim community into Dutch life and she championed the cause of oppressed Muslim women. She wrote the script for the film for which Van Gogh was assassinated.

Her life was in obvious danger, and the Dutch government provided around-the-clock protection for her. However, her Dutch neighbors obtained a court order forcing her to relocate because they feared spill-over violence to themselves from an expected assassination attempt. She moved to the United States and is now an American citizen.

Ali has lectured and written extensively. She takes the position that Islam itself (not "radicals" or "extremists") is at war with the West, and that violence and mistreatment of women are inherent in Islam. In short, she says Islam must be defeated. Her view is contrary to that espoused by George Bush and Tony Blair that Islam is a "religion of peace" and that the West has no beef with Islam - only with "Islamic extremists."

In 2005, Ali was named one of Time magazine's "100 most influential people in the world." She has received awards too numerous to list. She is currently is a fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

According to the Guardian, "In 2007, Ali helped establish the AHA Foundation, which works to protect and defend the rights of women in the West from oppression justified by religion and culture...The foundation also strives to protect basic rights and freedoms of women and girls. This includes control of their own bodies, access to an education and the ability to work outside the home and control their own income."

So Ali struggled through a brutal childhood, escaped a forced marriage, fled to the West, won a seat in the Dutch parliament, is a sought-after lecturer, and is an untiring champion of women's rights. Just the sort of person to whom an American university would award an honorary degree. Right?

Brandeis University was founded as a Jewish-sponsored school and named after Louis Brandeis, the first Jewish U.S. Supreme Court Justice. Brandeis extended an invitation to Ali to speak at their May 18

commencement and receive an honorary degree in social justice. In view of her life story, her achievements, and her work on behalf of women's rights, who could quibble with the recognition Brandeis sought to bestow?

Well, the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) could quibble, and did. Ibrahim Hooper, spokesman for CAIR, said "It is unconscionable that such a prestigious university would honor someone with such openly hateful views." CAIR sent a letter requesting the plans to honor Ali be dropped. A Muslim Student Association representative said, "This is a real slap in the face to Muslim students." And Joseph Lombardi, chairman of the Islamic Studies Department, said "This makes Muslim students feel very unwelcome."

Predictably, the Brandeis administration caved in to the pressure from the Muslim organizations and others of the campus community who joined the chorus against this women's rights activist. But their explanation was pretty lame "... her past statements are inconsistent with Brandeis University's core values"... and an honorary degree is "akin to affirming the body of a recipient's work." With what core value is Ali at odds? How does her body of work fall short? Brandeis doesn't say so, but presumably Ali's challenge against Islam's embrace of violence and its suppression of women are the sticking points.

In response to her rejection, Ali said "...the slur on my reputation is not the worst aspect of this episode. More deplorable is that an institution set up on the basis of religious freedom should today so deeply betray its own founding principles. The 'spirit of free expression' referred to in the Brandeis statement has been stifled here, as my critics have achieved their objective of preventing me from addressing the graduating class of 2014."

Thomas Doherty, chairman of American studies, said it would have been correct for the university to honor "such a courageous fighter for human freedom and women's rights, who has put her life at risk for those values."

As Daniel Halper wrote in the Weekly Standard, "The school administration buckled under to the Brandeis contingent of an increasingly entitled and belligerent faction on U.S. campuses who believe diversity, tolerance and justice only apply to positions and people whose views are consistent with their own."

Such is the status of the diversity of opinion and expression on college campuses today.

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