

Chapter 3

The grassroots organizations and the religious right

“Take your Sharia and go home, you terrorist lovers. Your hands are bloody! Your money is bloody! Get out! Terrorists! Terrorists! Terrorists!”

These statements were shouted by protestors at Muslim American children walking into a fundraiser event in Yorba Linda, California, in February of this year. The Muslim American families moved briskly into the building as some parents shielded their children from the men and women in the crowd, who were waving flags, carrying homemade signs, and barking obscenities. The taunts and howls of the mob were captured on video and later circulated online.

The YouTube video left many observers around the country outraged at the visceral display of hatred toward a minority group.¹ But it was just the latest in a string of events that have included vandalism at mosques, Koran burnings, and street protests against American Muslims.

Our nation is witnessing a rising tide in anti-Muslim sentiments. A *Washington Post*-ABC News poll last September showed that nearly half of Americans (49 percent) hold an unfavorable view of Islam, which is a 10 percent increase from October 2002.² Yet the Yorba Linda rally did not occur in a vacuum. Nor was it spontaneous. Some of the people involved are members of national organizations dedicated to targeting the Muslim American community. One of the largest such hate groups, ACT! for America, was involved in both the Yorba Linda incident and similar hate rallies in Tennessee, Florida, and other states, as this chapter of our report will demonstrate. This national movement builds on the success of their “Ground Zero mosque” hysteria over the planned Park51 community center in Manhattan—fueled in part by a team of paid organizers bent on stirring hatred.

Indeed, as the previous chapters of this report detail, the steady increase in demonstrations and other forms of harassment toward American Muslims is part of a calculated strategy that is paid for by a small clutch of foundations that fund some select Islamophobia network think tanks that in turn provide a wide array of mis-

characterized facts about the threat of Islam and Muslims in America. These think tanks in turn provide the incendiary rhetoric employed by ACT! for America and other grassroots groups promoting anti-Muslim hate.

Now these groups—the muscle of the Islamophobia network—are enjoying a boost in fundraising, thanks to their scare-mongering, often with the seed funding provided by the think tanks featured in the previous chapter. And they are hiring experienced political operatives to exploit the fear and hatred they peddle in the run-up to the 2012 national elections.

Notably, the anti-Muslim, anti-Islam grassroots network in America is increasingly successful because its members borrow tactics from the most innovative political movements of the last two decades. They use online strategies akin to those deployed by the progressive presidential campaigns of former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean and then-Illinois Sen. Barack Obama to recruit volunteers and keep them engaged. Some of these grassroots groups also hire talented evangelical organizers who built much of the conservative faith-based political movements that were prominent in the 1990s. And many of the groups tap into the growing force of the Tea Party as well as more established conservative political organizations.

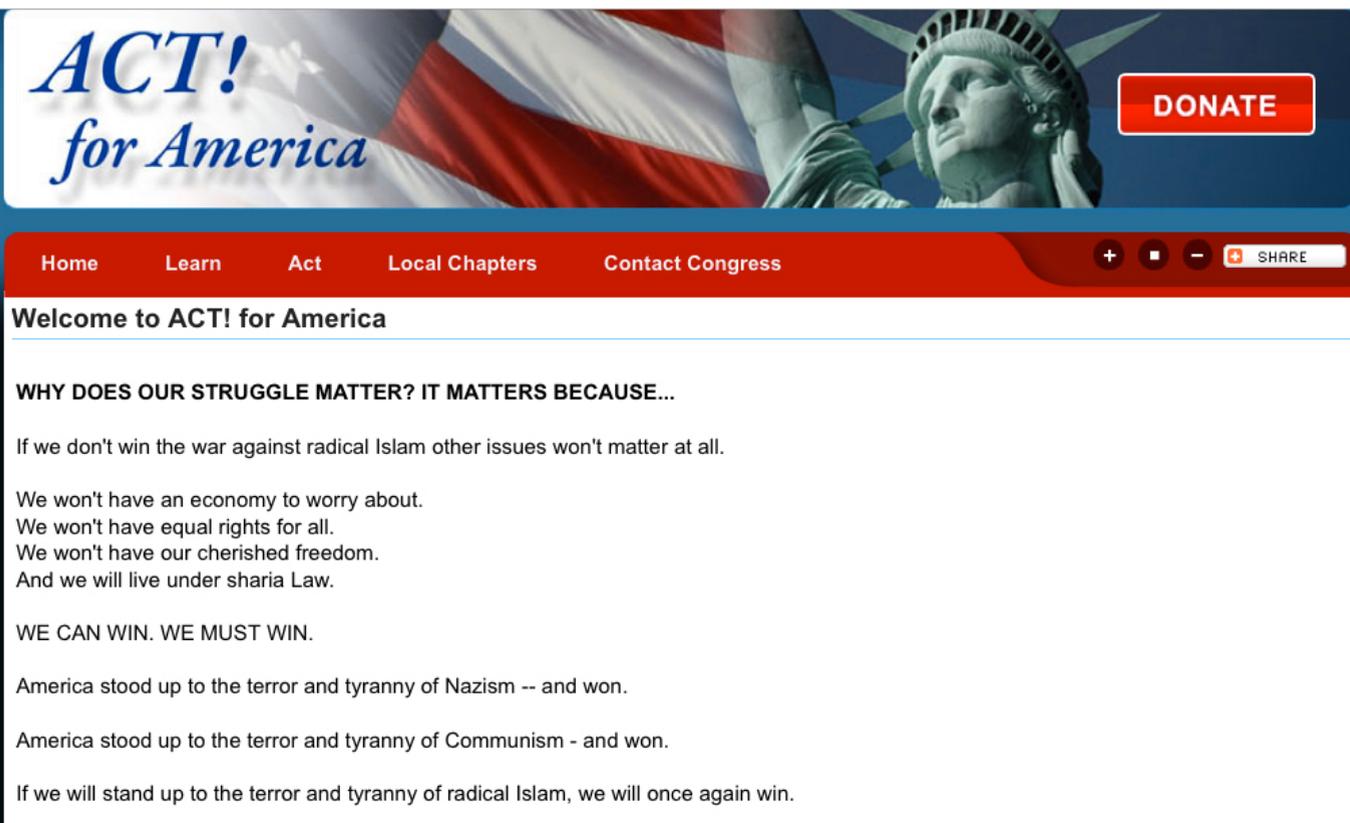
To understand the ability of the grassroots network to take messages to millions of Americans, this chapter will explore the leading groups responsible for developing grassroots organizations and anti-Muslim campaigns. These dedicated grassroots organizers have built lists and established local citizens groups they later rely on to turn out at rallies, make phone calls, testify on behalf of legislation, and donate money. In this section, we will look specifically at three types of anti-Muslim grassroots groups:

- Single-minded Islamophobia groups, exemplified by ACT! for America, one of the largest grassroots group dedicated to targeting Muslims
- Religious-right groups such as the American Family Association and the Eagle Forum, and anti-Muslim organizations such as Stop Islamization of America, which increasingly lead massive public information campaigns with myths and misinformation about Islam and Muslims
- State-based, local, and Tea Party organizations, including the Tennessee Freedom Coalition, the North Orange County (California) Conservative Coalition, the Patriot Action Network, and the First Coast Tea Party in Florida

We turn first to ACT! for America, a grassroots organization with membership chapters across the country.

ACT! for America: Single-minded, anti-Muslim focus

A right-wing pundit with boundless ambition, Brigitte Gabriel, age 46, founded ACT! for America in 2007 as a citizen action network to “inform, educate, and mobilize Americans regarding the multiple threats of radical Islam.”³ ACT! for America was crafted with the intention to replicate the success of the National Rifle Association as a single-issue group that can drive legislation, political races, and the national discourse. But instead of pushing gun rights, Gabriel’s group hopes to make fear of Islam a pillar of the Republican Party and a galvanizing force in politics. ACT! for America’s world view is laid out in this statement from its website:⁴



ACT!
for America

DONATE

Home Learn Act Local Chapters Contact Congress

SHARE

Welcome to ACT! for America

WHY DOES OUR STRUGGLE MATTER? IT MATTERS BECAUSE...

If we don't win the war against radical Islam other issues won't matter at all.

We won't have an economy to worry about.
We won't have equal rights for all.
We won't have our cherished freedom.
And we will live under sharia Law.

WE CAN WIN. WE MUST WIN.

America stood up to the terror and tyranny of Nazism -- and won.

America stood up to the terror and tyranny of Communism - and won.

If we will stand up to the terror and tyranny of radical Islam, we will once again win.

Called a “radical Islamophobe” by *The New York Times*,⁵ Gabriel travels the country giving talks about how she endured persecution in Lebanon as a Christian at the hands of radical Muslim terrorists.⁶ She says that Americans must unite to “defeat radical Islam,” and explains that any tolerance toward the religion will allow for the destruction of Western society.⁷ She is promoted as a valuable insider and expert on radical Islam due to her “first-hand account of her experiences in the opening salvos of Islamic Jihad towards the Western world in the Middle East.”⁸ Much of her rhetoric is riddled with crude bigotry.

For instance, she routinely says that every “practicing Muslim who believes in the teaching of the Quran cannot be a loyal citizen to the United States of America.”⁹ The fight against “radical Islam” for Gabriel apparently includes all Arabs as well. At a 2004 Duke University counterterrorism speakout, she explained the difference between Arabs (and Muslims) and Israelis: “It’s barbarism versus civilization. It’s democracy versus dictatorship. It’s goodness versus evil.”¹⁰

Gabriel informed the Christians United for Israel convention audience in 2007 that Arabs and Muslims “have no soul. They are dead set on killing and destruction. And in the name of something they call ‘Allah’ which is very different from the God we believe.”¹¹ Blending her personal story with anecdotes about the dangers of Islamic terror, Gabriel is a favorite of conservative conferences, Fox News, and Tea Party rallies. In this capacity, she validates the Islamophobia network’s manufactured fears and hate campaign directed against Muslims. And she validates and repeats the anti-Muslim memes promoted by Frank Gaffney, Daniel Pipes, and Robert Spencer, such as “President Obama was born into the Islamic faith,”¹² radical Muslims have “infiltrated” our government and “are being radicalized in radical mosques,”¹³ and that Muslims engage in *taqiyya*,¹⁴ which she describes as religiously mandated lying. She bases this last charge on the Center for Security Policy’s inaccurate definition of the Arabic word.

The Anti-Defamation League reviewed Gabriel’s activities and concluded, “Gabriel’s views are in line with a growing field of groups that use community concerns about Islamic extremism to stoke fear toward the Muslim community at large.”¹⁵ Discussing Gabriel and the network she is a part of, Brian Fishman, a research fellow at both the New America Foundation and the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, said, “When you’ve got folks who are looking for the worst in Islam and are promoting that as the entire religion of 1.5 or 1.6 billion people, then you only empower the real extremists.”¹⁶

Her general theme—that Americans must wake up and confront the threat of Islam in every corner of society—is found throughout ACT!’s literature and training materials. The ACT! website, for example, features a 52-slide PowerPoint detailing the typical ACT! training seminar, which claims Muslims are seeking to “conquer America” and “spread Sharia.”¹⁷ But what makes Gabriel’s organization unique is the sophistication with which it has applied its organizing goals.

The brain behind the anti-Muslim operation is former Christian Coalition strategist Guy Rodgers, who served as a consultant to the 2008 presidential campaign of Sen. John McCain (R-AZ).¹⁸ During his tenure as national field director at Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed’s Christian Coalition, Rodgers “planted and tended chapters across the country” and helped the organization become the Christian right’s “most potent political organization.”¹⁹ Rodgers, the national executive director of ACT!, runs an organization today that boasts 573 chapters and 170,000 members worldwide, according to Chris Slick, director of online operations for ACT!²⁰

ACT! pursues a multipronged strategy for building its activist base. The organization hosts a series of meetings to bring interested activists together and train them with best practices. Its most high-profile event is an annual conference to gather speakers from the anti-Muslim movement’s think tank core, among them *National Review* columnist Andrew McCarthy and Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Policy. Outspoken politician Rep. Allen West (R-FL) and the Christian Broadcast Network’s Erick Stakelbeck were among the speakers at ACT!’s national conference in 2011.²¹

To ingratiate itself with the larger conservative infrastructure, ACT! participates in many leading conferences and Tea Party events. It maintained a booth at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference,²² and can be found at events sponsored by other religious-right organizations.

But ACT!’s less visible but perhaps more important effort is its focus on local seminars. The group conducts roving training meetings, called “Citizen in Action training conferences,” for its grassroots members to learn the best way to communicate persuasive anti-Muslim messages, root out “suspicious activity in your community,” and “expose political correctness in your local media.”²³ The events are hosted by ACT!’s team of professional trainers, who have set up official local chapters in states from Hawaii to South Carolina.²⁴ Training meetings have occurred in Columbia, South Carolina; Bakersfield, Texas; Delray Beach, Florida;

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Denver, Colorado; and other locations since 2009.²⁵ Local chapters, such as the one in Memphis, Tennessee, have their own website, email listserv, and Facebook or a Ning-based social media platform.²⁶

ACT! not only relies on the echo chamber of anti-Muslim hate websites but also works to create its own content. In 2011, Gabriel launched a weekly television show on a Christian cable network to highlight the work of her group and to better broadcast the issue ACT!'s members are told to be outraged about each week.²⁷ The first show premiered with Rep. Peter King (R-NY), the influential chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security whom we profile in Chapter 5 of this report. Updates on ACT! campaigns and anti-Muslim propaganda are regularly distributed by ACT! organizers using its network of websites and local activist listservs.

Gabriel's weekly TV show on a Christian cable network tells members what to be outraged about each week.

Gabriel's relationship with lawmakers is pivotal to her group's success. While tending to her growing army of grassroots activists, Gabriel works with lawmakers on both the state and federal level to promote anti-Muslim legislation. She worked, for instance, with Rep. Sue Myrick (R-NC) to investigate the Muslim civil rights group Council on American-Islamic Relations and on state-based anti-Sharia bills.²⁸ She's hired a lobbyist to track bills in Congress, and she uses MeetUp.com and other social media websites to blast alerts to her active members.²⁹ These members write letters to the editor, call lawmakers, and rally in support of anti-Muslim politicians.

ACT!'s most successful effort to date is the 2009 launch of its Stop Sharia Now project to increase public awareness of the manufactured threat of creeping Sharia into America.³⁰ Since then, ACT! introduced David Yerushalmi's "anti-Sharia" bill to elected officials in several states,³¹ spearheaded by ACT! official Chris Slick, who is a GOP operative who served as a regional field director for Mitt Romney's presidential campaign in 2008.³²

In an interview with ThinkProgress.org, Slick detailed how "ACT! for America plays a major role in providing information about Sharia Law to lawmakers through our volunteers nationwide. We work with dozens of allies in this effort, including the APPA (American Public Policy Alliance that hired CSP's attorney to write the 'anti-sharia' bill)." He also said CSP's "Gaffney is one of dozens of allies in this effort. We welcome his help with our projects."³³

ACT!'s organizing strategy in South Carolina provides a window into the group and how it operates. After hosting an ACT! training session in Columbia, two local conservative bloggers joined the organization and set up a chapter. When state Sen. Mike Fair (R-Greenville) introduced anti-Sharia legislation in 2010, which was provided to him by Slick,³⁴ local ACT! chapter members were there to lend support. Brian Treacy, one of the ACT! chapter leaders, wrote a letter to *The Beaufort Gazette* to support state Sen. Fair's legislation, and others used the chapter's Facebook page to support the bill.³⁵

In 2010, Rodgers led the organization's fight against Muslim American Parvez Ahmed's nomination to serve on the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission.³⁶ Ahmed, a professor at the University of North Florida and a Fulbright Scholar, found himself mired in controversy following his otherwise routine appointment. Rodgers spearheaded ACT!'s effort to gin up controversy over Ahmed's appointment because of Ahmed's previous role as national chairman of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.³⁷ Rodgers says ACT!'s mission to oppose "the ideology of radical Islam is not hate. It's defending the security and freedom of our country."³⁸

Then there is the behind-the-scenes work of ACT! in the congressional anti-Muslim hearings led by Rep. Peter King (R-NY) earlier this year. In February 2011, just prior to the hearings, Gabriel told Think Progress about her work with Rep. King and how her organization had grown since its inception to be able to reach the center stage of Congress. Yet Gabriel said she had purposefully withdrawn from publicly participating in the hearings. She explained that her involvement would inflame liberals and discredit Rep. King's objectives.³⁹

This dedication to cause over embracing the limelight speaks to the serious nature of ACT!. Many Muslim-bashers such as former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich will trumpet hate in order to win short-term political battles, but ACT! is in it for the long haul. With a budget that grew to nearly \$1 million in 2009 (the most recently available numbers), ACT! has the resources to continue to grow.⁴⁰

Stop Islamization of America: Twisting free speech and religious freedom

In 2010, Pamela Geller co-founded the anti-Muslim group Stop Islamization of America with Robert Spencer to allegedly fight radical Islam.⁴¹

Geller claims that SIOA is a “human rights organization dedicated to freedom of speech, religious liberty, and individual rights; no special rights for special classes.”⁴² The Anti-Defamation League, however, reviewed the group’s activities and concluded that SIOA:

promotes a conspiratorial anti-Muslim agenda under the guise of fighting radical Islam. The group seeks to rouse public fears by consistently vilifying the Islamic faith and asserting the existence of an Islamic conspiracy to destroy ‘American’ values. The organization warns of the encroachment of shari’a, or Islamic law, and encourages Muslims to leave what it describes as the ‘falsity of Islam.’⁴³

Geller, age 53, is seeking to train and indoctrinate like-minded, anti-Muslim sympathizers with her new book *Stop Islamization of America*, which is self-described as a “practical primer for patriots” and “guide to lawful and peaceful resistance to Islamization.” A press release for the book says it outlines ties between the DOJ [Department of Justice] and Islamic organizations that are connected to the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁴

In the summer of 2010, SIOA led protests against the Park51 community center in New York City, which Geller and the industry deliberately mislabeled the “Ground Zero Mosque.” These were some of the handmade signs at Geller-organized sponsored protests against the Muslim community center:

- “No Obama’s Mosque”
- “Islam = 1400 years of Aggression, Murder!”
- “Peace of Islam = Cutting Non-Muslims to Pieces!”
- “Never Submit to Sharia – Islam!”⁴⁵

At another SIOA-sponsored protest that year, the crowd surrounded two Egyptian men who were speaking Arabic and told them to “go home” and “get out,” oblivious that they were Coptic Christians who came to support the protest.⁴⁶

In February 2011, SIOA released the film “The Ground Zero Mosque: Second Wave of the 911 Attacks,” which chronicles the protest movements against the “mosque”

and features Pamela Geller, Robert Spencer, and radical conservative media mogul Andrew Breitbart. For Geller, the film is part of her larger effort to “halt and roll back the advance of Islamic law and Islamic supremacy in America.”⁴⁷

SIOA has also sponsored inflammatory bus ads encouraging people to leave Islam that asked “Fatwa on Your Head?” and “Leaving Islam?” which ran in New York City, Detroit, and Miami, referring readers to its website RefugefromIslam.com.⁴⁸

The religious right

The religious right’s relationship with the Islamophobia network grows increasingly tighter, particularly since the end of the George W. Bush presidency. Well-established groups, among them the American Family Association and Eagle Forum, broadened organizing efforts from traditional social values hot-button issues such as gay marriage and abortion to include spreading conspiracy theories about Muslims. And groups such as Stop Islamization of America, founded by bloggers Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, have taken a lead role in shaping anti-Muslim propaganda.

As some overtly right-wing religious groups embrace the anti-Muslim cause, some right-of-center religious organizations have drifted in the same direction. So let’s take a look in more detail at four prominent leaders on the religious right, beginning with Pastor John Hagee.

John Hagee

John Hagee is a prime example of how the evangelical right has assimilated anti-Muslim messages. The founder of Christians United for Israel, Hagee, age 71, is also the CEO of Global Evangelism Television and the founder of a megachurch called Cornerstone. Hagee built a political power base by weaving Christian End Times theology with nationalistic pro-Israel organizations.

Hagee’s controversial views, including writing that praised the Holocaust, forced Sen. McCain, shortly after securing the Republican Party’s presidential

nomination in 2008, to reject his endorsement.⁴⁹ Hagee perpetuates several myths about Islam and American Muslims:

- “Ladies and gentlemen, America is at war with radical Islam Jihad has come to America. If we lose the war to Islamic fascism, it will change the world as we know it.”⁵⁰
- “They are trained from the breast of their mother to hate us. Radical Islam is a doctrine of death. It is their desire, it is their hope, it is their ambition, it is their highest honor to die in a war against infidels. And you are ‘infidels’ and there is nothing you can do to accommodate them. That’s what makes them so dangerous.”⁵¹
- “Radical sects, which include about 200 million Islamics, believe they have a command from God to kill Christians and Jews.”⁵²

Hagee draws on other members of the Islamophobia network to drive home his mistaken points. He featured Frank Gaffney at his Christians United for Israel conferences, and insisted that the United States intervene against Iran, which he believes is committed to destroying Western civilization.⁵³ In a recent fundraising appeal, Hagee repeats Gaffney’s alarmist rhetoric, arguing that “global Shari’ah means that every nation in the world will be living under Islamic Law. Never forget this is a theological war!”⁵⁴

Pat Robertson

Pat Robertson is another major evangelical figure who increasingly spews anti-Muslim rhetoric and puts his considerable resources into aiding the anti-Islam movement. Robertson, age 81, is able to promote his anti-Islam bigotry through his lucrative and influential Christian Broadcasting Network, which we profile in the next chapter of this report. In 1989, he created the Christian Coalition, the precursor to Ralph Reed’s Faith and Freedom Coalition, focusing on conservative Christian political advocacy. While the Christian Coalition has faded from the public view, Robertson’s other ventures, the Christian Broadcasting Network, Regent University, and the American Center for Law and Justice, have grown.

Robertson acts as co-host of “The 700 Club,” the Christian Broadcasting Network’s most popular and enduring program that serves as a multimedia pul-

pit for Robertson’s right-wing political-religious ideologies. Less than two weeks after Anders Breivik’s deadly attacks in Norway, for example, Pat Robertson and “The 700 Club” had Robert Spencer on to discuss the “cult” of Islam. Robertson didn’t put any tough questions to Spencer about his role in inspiring Breivik’s violence. Instead, Spencer went unchallenged in a rant against the media and repeated his tract demonizing all Muslims. “[The media] constantly gloss over and sometimes outright deny that fact that Islamic jihadists use the texts and teachings of Islam to promote violence and incite peaceful Muslims to commit acts of violence,” said Spencer, completely sidestepping his own role in influencing Breivik’s worldview.⁵⁵

We detail Robertson’s anti-Muslim media strategies in our next chapter on the media, so here we concentrate on his grassroots influence, which centers on a grassroots think tank Robertson founded to defend religious freedom for Christians.

Created in 1990 to counter the American Civil Liberties Union, Robertson’s American Center for Law and Justice claims to be a leading defender of religious freedom. Recently, that led ACLJ to focus more and more on Islam. Specifically, ACLJ filed a lawsuit to block the construction of the Park51 community center in New York City, thereby effectively attempting to deprive a non-Christian religious community of its constitutionally protected rights.⁵⁶

Jay Sekulow, executive director of ACLJ, argued in an opinion piece in *The Washington Times* that “the opposition to the ground-zero mosque reflects America’s sacrosanct First Amendment ideals,” essentially arguing that the freedom of speech to oppose the building of the mosque trumped freedom of religion.⁵⁷ ACLJ’s attorney Brett Joshpe then elaborated on his organization’s bias: “Would [we] be personally involved in this matter if this were a church? No.... And the reason why is because if it were a church it wouldn’t be offending and hurting the 9/11 victims’ families.”⁵⁸

ACLJ also teamed up with Fox News and Patrick Poole, who writes for the right-wing Pajamas Media blog, to manufacture hysteria of a potential radical Islamist infiltration of the Congressional Muslim Staff Association.⁵⁹ Poole wrote in David Horowitz’s *FrontPage Magazine* that the CMSA hosted speakers with “terror ties” at the weekly prayer service held on Capitol Hill.⁶⁰

Fox News published its report, and the Christian Broadcasting Network ran the headline “Calls Rise to Probe Capitol Hill Muslim Prayer Sessions,”⁶¹ with the

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only known call coming from Robertson’s own ACLJ.⁶² The ACLJ then parroted Robertson’s paranoia, stating that the “absurdity” of inviting “the very terrorists who want to destroy America” to Capitol Hill “raises a host of significant questions—including concerns about national security” and, based on Fox’s “report,” warrants a “thorough investigation.”⁶³

In manufacturing the incident, Fox and the ACLJ missed one small, important fact—the Friday prayers have nothing to do with the Congressional Muslim Staff Association. Explaining what was really going on, investigative journalist Sarah Posner of *Religious Dispatches* details how CMSA hosts briefings on different issues as well as an annual *iftar* (an evening meal during the holy month of Ramadan), but not the weekly Friday prayers, which are held “under the auspices of the House chaplain.”⁶⁴

In manufacturing one incident, Fox and the ACLJ missed one small, important fact—the Friday prayers have nothing to do with the Congressional Muslim Staff Association.

The ACLJ also is active on campus. One case in point: Robertson’s group recently used its resources to assist Barry Sommer, president of ACT! for America’s Oregon branch, in legal action against the state’s Lane Community College, which dropped Sommer’s class “What is Islam?” after it was alerted to his history of anti-Islam comments and his close association with ACT! for America.⁶⁵

The ACLJ threatened to sue the school for violating Sommer’s First Amendment right to teach what ACT! believes—that it must save America from the “authoritarian values of radical Islam, such as the celebration of death, terror and tyranny.”⁶⁶

The lawsuit provided more grist for ACT! and its grassroots activists to cast themselves as victims in the fight against Muslim groups pushing to “impose sharia law in America.” And once again, ACLJ’s legal efforts sparked outrage and provided cover for far-right elements of the Islamophobia campaign.

Ralph Reed and the Faith and Freedom Coalition

Ralph Reed was Pat Robertson’s former protégé who galvanized the Christian Coalition before it was undone by corruption and his questionable partnership with convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Reed, age 50, has resurrected his career with the Faith and Freedom Coalition, which he deems a “21st-century version of the Christian Coalition” designed to unite and mobilize evangelical and Tea Party voters to form a powerful and effective Christian Conservative voting bloc.⁶⁷ Reed seeks to duplicate his success with the Christian Coalition, which became one

of the premier organizations of the religious right and helped Republicans take control of the House and Senate in 1994.⁶⁸

Reed promised his supporters that the Faith and Freedom Coalition in 2012 “will register an estimated one million new faith-based voters and make tens of millions of voter contacts in what may be the largest conservative get-out-the-vote effort in modern political history.”⁶⁹ As stated on its website, one of the organization’s goals is to “influence legislation and enact sound public policy at every level of government.”⁷⁰

Another stated goal of the organization is to “protest bigotry and discrimination of people of faith.”⁷¹ Yet at its recent annual conference, the Faith and Freedom Coalition featured CSP’s Frank Gaffney, who gave a talk on “Defeating Terrorism and Jihad” with co-panelists and frequent allies Erick Stakelbeck of CBN News and David French of the American Center for Law and Justice, both employees of Pat Robertson’s vast evangelical empire. At the conference, Gaffney suggested “it is certainly possible we’d have a Muslim flag flying over the White House,” and hoped FFC would “take up the fight against shari’ah.”⁷²

Franklin Graham

Franklin Graham is an American Christian evangelist, missionary, and son of the world’s most recognizable and influential evangelist, Billy Graham. The 59-year-old Graham is the president and CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan’s Purse, an international Christian relief organization.⁷³

Franklin Graham called Islam “a very evil and wicked religion” in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington. On CNN, he boldly declared “true Islam cannot be practiced in this country” since “You can’t beat your wife. You cannot murder your children if you think they’ve committed adultery or something like that, which they do practice in these other countries.”⁷⁴

He has echoed Frank Gaffney’s paranoid talking points regarding a Muslim infiltration. Graham says the Muslim Brotherhood has infiltrated the Obama administration and is shaping U.S. foreign policy.⁷⁵ Graham also believes President Obama was “born a Muslim.”⁷⁶ He has protested the construction of the Park51 community center, suggesting that Muslims “will claim now that the World Trade

Center property ... is Islamic land.”⁷⁷ On April 22, 2010, the Pentagon rescinded his invitation to speak at the National Day of Prayer event in response to his anti-Islam, fear-mongering comments.⁷⁸

On October 2010, Graham participated in ABC’s Town Hall debate asking “Should Americans Fear Islam?”⁷⁹ One of his fellow co-debaters was Robert Spencer, director of the Jihad Watch. On the show, Graham asserted Muslims “want to build as many mosques and cultural centers as they possibly can so they can convert as many Americans as they can to Islam. I understand that.”⁸⁰

American Family Association, Eagle Forum, and Tennessee Freedom Coalition

While Robertson’s ACLJ and Hagee’s Christians United for Israel can draw audiences to their anti-Muslim diatribes, they lack sustained bonds with a right-wing grassroots movement. Longtime Christian right-wing groups such as the Eagle Forum and the American Family Coalition, fill the void, alongside a new organization, the Tennessee Freedom Coalition.

First let’s examine the Eagle Forum and American Family Coalition. Both organizations are older, and have roots in harnessing backlash movements. The Eagle Forum, founded by Phyllis Schlafly, gained prominence by helping to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸¹ The American Family Association has harnessed many social right crusades, particularly the anti-gay activism among evangelicals.⁸² Today, both organizations boast an additional calling—Islamophobia.

Bryan Fischer, the director of issues analysis for the American Family Association, is a prominent hate radio talk show host (we profile him and his actions in the next chapter of the report) who increasingly peppers his shows with anti-Islam, anti-Muslim diatribes. Fischer, age 60, and his organization also spread this rhetoric through its large email listserv and local chapters across the country.⁸³

The Eagle Forum, which caters mostly to the home-school movement and to women who identify as social values activists,⁸⁴ touts its legacy of protesting feminist values.⁸⁵ Increasingly, though, Eagle Forum is entwining itself with the Islamophobia network. At its 2009 How to Take Back America conference, for example, the Eagle

Forum held multiple sessions on the threat of radical Islam.⁸⁶ And the group now partners with Gabriel's ACT! for America and Gaffney's Center for Security Policy to push anti-Muslim issues, particularly anti-Sharia hysteria.⁸⁷

At its 2011 Eagle Forum conference in St. Louis, Missouri, for example, Gabriel, Gaffney, and others in the network revealed a new supposed threat: Muslim Gulen schools, which they claim would educate children through the lens of Islam and teach them to "hate Americans." Worse, the speakers alleged that President Obama's support for charter school reforms was a back-door strategy for using taxpayer money to fund the schools.⁸⁸ Of course, Gulen schools are nothing of the sort. They are the product of moderate Turkish Muslim educators who want "a blend of religious faith and largely western curriculum."⁸⁹

The Tennessee Eagle Forum chapter works closely with the Tennessee Freedom Coalition, created in March 2011 by Lou Ann Zelenik.⁹⁰ She galvanized anti-Muslim hysteria in 2010 by leading the protest of the proposed Islamic center in Murfreesboro during her failed campaign for the Sixth District Republican congressional nomination.⁹¹ Zelenik claimed some in the Muslim community "want to destroy our civilization" and cited it as a reason she opposed the mosque.⁹² She relied on Frank Gaffney's expertise to justify her unsubstantiated and incorrect allegations.⁹³

The Tennessee Freedom Coalition recently produced a 16-minute video with another grassroots organization from Boston, Americans for Peace and Tolerance, in which they "expose" the radical Islamist preachers in Nashville who allegedly indoctrinated Vanderbilt students and Nashville mosque members with anti-Americanism.⁹⁴ The specious claims and smears in the video were roundly debunked,⁹⁵ but that did not stop Tennessee State Sen. Bill Ketron from giving the biased video to fellow senators to garner support for his anti-Sharia bill, the Material Support to Designated Entities Act, which passed both houses of the state legislature on May 21, 2011. The bill was co-sponsored by the Tennessee Eagle Forum, Tennessee Freedom Coalition, and ACT! for America Middle Tennessee Chapter.⁹⁶

State-based, local, and Tea Party grassroots groups

Across the country, many grassroots conservative organizations have championed causes pushed by the Islamophobia network. Although most national Tea Party groups identify closely with libertarianism and eschew social crusades, various local Tea Parties have pushed anti-Muslim campaigns just as vigorously as such groups as ACT! for America.

This year, for example, Tea Party Fort Lauderdale is protesting to shut down a mosque in Florida whose imam, Izhar Khan, is charged with sending money to the Taliban.⁹⁷ City Commissioner Lesa Peerman said the mosque has peacefully co-existed in the community for many years, adding, “I don’t believe in holding an organization responsible for the actions of one individual.”⁹⁸ But Tea Party Fort Lauderdale activist Danita Kilcullen doesn’t see it that way, arguing that “after this mosque’s imam was found to be involved in financing a terrorist group, how can this mosque be allowed to remain open?”⁹⁹

Leading the protest alongside Tea Party Fort Lauderdale is O’Neal Dozier, who serves on the board of Ralph Reed’s Faith and Freedom Coalition.¹⁰⁰ Dozier, age 62, believes, “The Muslim people we believe are beautiful people... They’re beautiful people, we just believe that the Muslim people are victims of a very dangerous and evil religion and that religion is Islam.”¹⁰¹

Dozier also runs the publication *Judeo-Christian View*, which pushes pastors to talk more about “Islamofascism” from the pulpit.¹⁰² The group distributed 325,000 copies of the anti-Islam DVD “Obsession,” produced by the Clarion Fund, to clergy members.¹⁰³ Dozier himself has called Islam a “cult.”¹⁰⁴ And in 2007 he filed a lawsuit to stop construction of a mosque nearby the Worldwide Christian Center in Pompano Beach where he serves as pastor.¹⁰⁵

Many Tea Party leaders claim their movement is simply libertarian, taking a hands-off approach to social values, yet many Tea Party members and local chapters hold nationalistic, right-wing beliefs and are drifting into anti-Muslim campaigns. Because the Tea Party is decentralized, various groups will act independently of one another and in some cases work hand-in-glove with Islamophobic grassroots organizations. The online social networks cultivated by the Tea Party provide a large springboard for massive demonstrations.

Case in point: William Federer, a member of Florida's First Coast Tea Party, is teaching members "What Every American Needs to Know About the Koran" using his video and slideshow presentation.¹⁰⁶ Federer teaches that the only difference between moderate Muslims and radicals is that "moderate Muslims believe the world will submit to Allah later... Fundamentalist Muslims, on the other hand, think the world is in the process of submitting to Allah now."¹⁰⁷ Federer has a PowerPoint presentation that he uses to disseminate anti-Muslim views among Tea Party circles in Florida.

According to Julie Ingersoll, a reporter who has covered Federer's presentation, he depicts a "caricature of Muslims and Muhammad as illiterate, perverted, sexist, and responsible for slavery."¹⁰⁸ More traditional right-wing social conservatives are spreading Federer's hate, too. The American Family Association, for example, is selling "Islamic Conquest," a five-part series by Federer, who is also associated with the Eagle Forum.¹⁰⁹

Tea Party leaders, though, seem to be most focused on slinging President Obama with their anti-Islam, anti-Muslim conspiracy theories. In February, for example, Phillip Dennis, leader of the Texas Tea Party, continued to parrot the deliberate obfuscation of President Obama's religion to simultaneously taint the intentions behind his administration's outreach to Muslim communities and also paint Islam as a religion of violence. Appearing on MSNBC, when asked by host Chris Matthews if President Obama was a Muslim, he replied:

I don't know.... President Obama certainly has a soft spot in his heart for Islam. His first speech was in Egypt. He's reached out to the Muslims more so than any other president in the history of the world. He's even changed our history, saying that Islam has always played a major part in this country when everyone knows that's not true... this is that type of things he's done, bowing to the leader of Saudi Arabia... To those people [who believe President Obama is a Muslim] [they] have a right, certainly it's understandable that they might have a problem that our president might be Muslim. Absolutely.¹¹⁰

Judson Phillips, age 51, the president of the Tea Party Nation Corporation, does his fellow believer Dennis one better. He says President Obama is "a corrupt, unpopular President from the party of treason" whom he believes received campaign contributions from Hamas in 2009.¹¹¹

More traditional right-wing social conservatives are spreading William Federer's hate, too.

The growing clout of the Islamophobia grassroots organizations and religious-right groups

The most vivid reminders that the rising tide of anti-Muslim hate is catching fire with the American public are constant examples of well-attended demonstrations against American Muslims. These incidents are tethered to a machine that is designed to orchestrate such protests as part of a larger campaign of hatred. In some cases, these grassroots groups are part of a new network of targeted hate at Islam and American Muslims, while others reflect a realignment of priorities in the conservative movement.

Regardless, the highly motivated interests driving the anti-Muslim organizing campaign are an important and often neglected part of the Islamophobia phenomenon. These groups harness paranoia and hate spread in society by a multitude of other actors in the anti-Muslim sphere. They couldn't exist, however, without a propaganda machine that provides constant ammunition for these captains of hate to spur networks of activists into action alongside willing media enablers—the subject of our next chapter.

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