

## Boston Bombing, Islamophobia and Sudden Ignorance Syndrome

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Before the dust settled and the wounded taken care of, discourses about the terror of “Islam” and “Islamic conspiracies” erupted into several 24-hour news cycle and social media frenzy that included absurd racist commentaries and unsubstantiated allegations about the identities of the Boston Marathon bombers on April 15, 2013. Conservative columnist, Erik Rush, tweeted jokes about rounding up Saudis and killing them just hours after the explosions to which he later deleted, and claimed that it was all sarcasm.



Not to be outdone, Pamela Geller of Stop the Islamization of America (SIOA), quickly and quite predictably, laid the blame on a “Jihadist,” and admonished those who doubted her on Twitter responding to them with “Blood on your hands” and “Savages” tweets.



From social media to the cable news, the unending litany of Islamophobic provocations continues unabated. According to Media Matters, a non-profit research group dedicated to debunking conservative falsehoods in media, Frank Gaffney appeared on *Fox and Friends Saturday* on an April 20<sup>th</sup> appearance who claimed that the FBI was not “allowed to look for jihad” and criticized its cooperation with the American Muslim community when looking for terrorist threats. Gaffney has been long discredited as an anti-Islamic activist. But his hawkish and incendiary statements continue to make him a favorite among Islamophobes, and a powerful voice to sow anti-Muslim anxieties and prejudices in the wake of the Boston tragedy. Indeed, in the discourse of the Boston tragedy, the usual cadre of Islamophobes took to the airwaves, TV shows, blogs, and social media to share with the world – again – about the dangers Muslims pose to America and Western civilization. They include: Representative Peter King, Ann Coulter, Newt Gingrich, Steven Emerson, David Horowitz, Robert Spencer, Daniel Pipes, Sean Hannity, Glen Beck, Brigitte Gabriel, and “native experts” such as Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, Nasser Weddady and Asra Numani.

But perhaps one of the most unsettling discourses to re-emerge with greater intensity with total disregard for its social impacts not just for Muslim Americans but for everyone is that of “Sudden Jihad Syndrome.” The SJS coined by Daniel Pipes (<http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Sudden-jihad-syndrome>) , the founder of McCarthyism like witch hunt site, Campus Watch, and a leading cultural racist with single minded hatred for anything Muslim and a long history of problematizing Islam. He was a Bush appointee to the US Institute of Peace in 2006, the syndrome characterizes “normal Muslims” who unexpectedly and without warning engage in acts of terror. The implications are sweeping. According to this “syndrome,” all Muslims must be considered to be potential terrorists, and must therefore be subjected to all forms of surveillance, policing, and detention for the sake of “national security” regardless of your national origins, ethnicity, U.S. citizenship, etc. Pipes’ “syndrome” is complete lunacy. But in a time like the Boston Marathon tragedy its utility is without a doubt productive for agitating anti-Islamic sentiments and preying upon the public’s xenophobic anxieties. More importantly, because we now know the identity of the two attackers – 26-year-old Tamerlan Tsarnaev, and 19-year-old Dzhokhar Tsarnaev who had been living in the United States since 2007 – the subject of their “normal” upbringing and sudden turn to radical violence vis-à-vis Islam is generating renewed interest in Pipes’ “Sudden Jihad Syndrome” that not only adds to the media noise and confusion surrounding the Boston tragedy for the general public, but also to rattle the sabers of Islamophobes for another “clash of civilizations,” that is to say, inching their way from a mere clash to an impending “war of cultures.” The late Edward Said correctly described the phenomena as a “clash of ignorance” and one that fails to comprehend the basic attributes of civilization.

### **Sudden Jihad Syndrome or Sudden Ignorance Syndrome!**

“Islam”, “sharia” and “clash of civilization experts” emerged from a prolonged semi-hibernation and immediately rushed into frenzy with an unending barrage of absurd comments, unsubstantiated allegations and overtly racist conclusions that boil down to the onset of an extreme case of Sudden Ignorance Syndrome. This massive syndrome renders an otherwise highly educated, university graduate and professional “expert” completely ignorant and incapable of basic logic, sound arguments and understanding. At an advanced stage, as the case

of Pipes and Geller, the Sudden Ignorance Syndrome can lead to extreme and readily visible cases of racism, bigotry and Islamophobia.

Indeed, in the aftermath of the Boston tragedy, a number of individuals suffering from an acute state of Sudden Ignorance Syndrome took to the airwaves, TV shows and a host of internet sites to share with the rest of us the dangers Muslims, as a class, pose to America and Western civilization as whole. The basic assumption in the “war of cultures” is a direct confrontation with Islam itself that is central to their so-called “analysis.” Thus it is easy to hear news reports, bloggers, and the like blame the Qur’an, Islam, and the Prophet Muhammad for the crime of one person or few individuals. Racists and Islamophobes have an equal opportunity “mind” set when it comes to expressing hate and bigotry. Being Muslim is the crime and walking down the street is the proof of guilt! Thus, the crime of the terrorist is immediate, while that of the Islamophobes is long-lasting, for it creates and impresses on our collective public mind the logic of hate and racism that is then packaged to further justify the logic of “clash of ignorance” that is foundational to their “Syndrome.”

Let me be absolutely clear. Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev committed horrific crimes, ones that took the lives of three individuals, shattered dozens, and left the City of Boston in fear. But the Islamophobic machine committed crimes against our collective consciousness by exploiting the suffering and pain of our fellow citizens. Their words became a powerful incendiary to inflame the minds of an already panicked people.

Getting back to the Sudden Ignorance Syndrome and noticing that none of the above is important for the Islamophobes since Muslim guilt is already established and their voices end-up intruding into our collective consciousness to such an extent that we no longer view the world with our own eyes and through an independent epistemology. How can we identify these arguments, how to protect our collective consciousness and how to remedy the crisis of latent and manifest racist discourses! I do think that the majority of Americans and the world population would like to protect themselves from this pernicious Sudden Ignorance Syndrome, and a detailed diagnosis is a must to help counter its effects. At the start it might be useful to introduce a multi-coded threat level ranging from just extremely ignorant, somewhat ignorant, ignorant, once in a while

ignorant, and just ignorant around Muslims! What are the symptoms, how to identify them and what is the cure if any?

As a matter of fact, I have seen and treated many such cases in the past and the symptoms are very easy to identify. The signs of Sudden Ignorance Syndrome can range from constant over generalization and simplification about Islam and Muslims as well as a tendency to speak of areas in the Muslim world which the person inflicted with this Syndrome has no knowledge of, actually visited it, can correctly locate it on a map, or did any research in the field. But remember, ignorance demands such distance from the subject matter and more so if it is related to Islam, due to the “real” fear of creeping Sharia or practicing taqiyya. In addition, no language skills are needed and only Islamophobe-sanctioned translations are admissible; the more violent the Arabic rendition to English the better, not to mention the narrow selections of such texts, for ignorance demands limiting the scope of “research” to one concept -- Jihad. Individuals suffering from an onset of Sudden Ignorance Syndrome are quick to assert that “strong” links are present between any single terrorist or violent event committed by Muslim/s or someone who looks like one, and President Obama, Congressman Keith Ellison, Imam Suhib Webb, CAIR, the Brotherhood Movement, and Al-Qaeda; all of them are engaged in a conspiracy to take over “our” America, and have been infiltrating every part of the government and society to carry out their plans. In the Islamophobes’ “mind”, President Obama, a “real” Muslim in hiding, was planted in the White House in a massive conspiracy to take over the country, and this is why his birth certificate is crucial evidence for uncovering this plan.

More importantly, the determining of cause and effect central to any analysis is completely missing from these individuals’ assertions. Thus it is easy to hear them blame Muslims, as a class, for the crime of one person or few individuals. For this group, the problem is a man called Islam who always walks down the wrong street and ought to be arrested at once. Why Islam is walking down the wrong street is not important; just the mere fact of being Islam renders it guilty and by extension anyone related to it by six degrees of separation. I do need to remind you that a similar treatment is offered to African Americans with the idea of driving or walking while black; thus racists have an equal opportunity “mind” set when it comes to expressing hate and bigotry.

As such, for those suffering from an acute and advanced stage of Sudden Ignorance Syndrome, it makes perfect sense to link Imam Suhib Webb, the Imam of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, by six or more like sixty degrees of separation to everything wrong done by a Muslim since the dawn of time. A similar charge was directed at Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf during the “Ground Zero Mosque” Islamophobic campaign lead at the time by Pamela Geller, a good example of an individual exhibiting publicly the extreme and incurable effects of this Syndrome. In their own “mind” (no one conducted a CT scan to verify it) Imam Suhib Webb’s guilt is already established since he was seen walking with “brother Islam” down the wrong street and no more evidence is needed.

Coming back to diagnosing the Sudden Ignorance Syndrome while keeping Imam Webb in mind, one symptom that rears its ugly head at every opportunity is the utter disdain and open hostility directed at any respectable Muslim figure or organization in this country and abroad. Those suffering from it are always looking for the “good” Muslim, which in their “mind” represents a person who is identical to them and has completely abandoned Islam following the road-map of Ayaan Hirsi Ali (<http://www.linktv.org/video/6211>) by leaving the religion and then calling on others to do the same as the only solution for the “Muslim problem.” Another “good Muslim” is Asra Nomani who is using the Boston tragedy to once again stand with the Islamophobes and peddle a public discourse that blames all Muslims, as a class, for the crime of the two suspects; in addition, she problematizes the use of Arabic by all Muslims as a language of piety by defining it as a red flag on the road to radicalization. ([http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-04-23/national/38747889\\_1\\_radicalization-bombers-islam](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-04-23/national/38747889_1_radicalization-bombers-islam)) The bad Muslim is anyone that continues to have an expressed attachment to his/her religion and applies it as an epistemic basis for their life and engagement in the world. For sure the Sudden Ignorance Syndrome is only capable of binary level and dimwitted analysis, which in actuality is a self-constructed binary shaped in a mirrored mental vacuum and obfuscated for the quick media cycle to appear as if it is an authentically self-constituted and a diversely engaged counterpart.

A more frightful symptom on display at the drop of a pin is represented by the unique charge directed at Muslim men and their utterly savage nature when it comes to the treatment of women in general and Muslim women in particular. In this case, Muslim men are uniquely constructed as the only male specimens exhibiting unrestrained hostility toward women, and it requires the vigilant intervention of the “ultra-feminist” white males to rescue Muslim women from this apparent bondage. Make no mistake about it: the older of the two Boston bombers had a long and well-documented history of violence against his girlfriends, but for the Islamophobes with the Sudden Ignorance Syndrome, the cause of this violence is Islam and the Qur’an is asserted to be the “training manual” for all Muslim men committing violence against women. Yet, if the cause of domestic violence or violence against women broadly is Islam and the Qur’an, then how do we explain the high rate of abuse directed at women by all the “good” men in America, Christian, Jewish, Hindu and Atheists alike? It must be that they are all closet Muslims, so the Islamophobes would be right to reintroduce not only the “Patriot Act” but something more like the Black Code and the Inquisition. Michelle Malkin has endorsed internment as an option for Muslims (<http://hnn.us/articles/7094.html>), which must be taken to mean that once constitutionally wrong is not sufficient for those with extreme cases of Sudden Ignorance Syndrome.

A symptom concurrent with the above is a constant need to undertake gross historical simplification and the selective deployment of history as a tool to establish victimhood and render Islam and Muslims guilty from pre-time to the end of time. Identifying barbarians at the gates of “civilization”, searching history for war and conflicts, are the repertoire of those suffering from the Sudden Ignorance Syndrome. Islam and Muslims by extension are uniquely depicted as trans-historical violent phenomena that must be stopped by the use of maximum violence -including nuclear weapons if needed - since they understand no other language but that of “force” Such is the view of Bernard Lewis, who suffers from a compounded and severe case of Sudden Ignorance Syndrome, since not only he knows not what he talks about when it comes to the modern Muslim world but he is also categorical in refusing any remedies provided by first-rate researchers and specialists on the subject. Bernard Lewis’ question about Islam of “What Went Wrong?” should be asked in relation to European history with emphasis on the Inquisition, genocide of the Natives in the Americas, the European Trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonization,

Apartheid South Africa, WWI and WWII, with the good White Aryan Christian Europeans responsible for the Holocaust and the only use of nuclear weapons against civilians recorded in history to this day. One also can mention the use of Agent Orange in the forests of Vietnam not even showing the slightest concerns for our own flesh and blood fighting underneath. “What Went Wrong” with our economy, led by the best and the brightest ready to sell their own mothers’ and fathers’ pensions to make an extra dollar at the expense of ethics and morality? If history could speak of our past, what would it say and would we arrest it for its honesty?

Could we ask the question of why European and American history has been so violent and constantly racist and why so far no one has officially excommunicated Hitler and other Colonial figures from the Church? Also, when will official apologies will be forthcoming for Native Americans, African Americans, women as a class, and colonized people all over the world? Those affected by the Sudden Ignorance Syndrome are preoccupied with anything Muslim or Islam and classifying the Muslim people of being less than fully human, definitely not “civilized”; it is doubtful if they can be admitted to this country club that has been distinctively Eurocentric in all its formation and genocidal toward non-white societies.

The two terrorists committed a crime, but the Islamophobic crowd commits a crime against our collective consciousness by using the suffering and pain of our fellow citizens to peddle their own racism and bigotry and pass it off as sound analysis of what is confronting us as a society. In this case, the criminals’ act of terrorizing the participants in the Boston Marathon and the city becomes a tool utilized to “spray” verbal poison and venom on the minds of people and urge them to engage in a mob-type electronic and public lynching of Muslims at home and abroad. Thus, the crime of the terrorist is immediate, while that of the Islamophobes is long-lasting, for it creates and impresses on our collective public mind the logic of hate and racism that is then packaged to further justify the logic of “clash of ignorance” that is foundational to their Syndrome.

The criminals who committed the crime should be brought to justice, and one of them will have his day in court. What we are facing at present is the attempt of the Islamophobes to cast a shadow of doubt on Muslims, as a class, and to call for their treatment collectively as guilty; they must work to prove their innocence not in a court of law but in the court of a constructed public



opinion into which a vitriolic barrage of racism, bigotry and Islamophobia has been emptied. No discussion takes place of the Canadian Imam who two days after the Boston bombings managed to alert authorities and lead to the arrest of likely terrorists. What motivated him to report it? Could it be his faith? Could it be that he acted like many other Muslims who managed to prevent many other terrorism cases by reporting when they saw something illegal and harmful? The Sudden Ignorance Syndrome causes individuals to only see evil Muslims and render them incapable of basic decent human function of treating people as individuals and not as a single undifferentiated group.

None of these masters of deception and obfuscation has any qualification in the areas of criminology, security studies, or hands-on training in the field, but remember, belonging to the Sudden Ignorance Syndrome collective requires no specialization other than the readiness to be ignorant and call others to do the same. Racism is at its roots is founded upon a heavy dose of ignorance, but once power is added to it then you have a most extreme toxic mix. Their minds are made-up, the conclusions are set, and “facts” and “historical” records are mined to legitimize a throwback racist construct that was completely discredited with the end of WWII. They collectively hide behind the veneer of “clash of civilizations” and “clash of cultures” sophistication, and use the crimes of terrorist to march toward victory. I can see the Islamophobes celebrate every terrorist attack, for it supports their thesis and assures them yet another avalanche of media appearances so they can diffuse their venom via the public airwaves and pontificate on how they were right all along and how the “liberals” or the Muslim-loving Obama administration and the politically correct are to blame for these attacks. Furthermore, they demand that we listen to their ready-made racist recipes of monitoring all Muslims with cameras in each mosque, a secret agent in every community, and a torture black hole in every location. I guess their vision of civilization comes directly from the Dark Ages or the Inquisition; in order to save our “civilization,” we must destroy it one Muslim man and one hijab-wearing woman at a time.

The Sudden Ignorance Syndrome is real and one can't escape it or those affected by it, since they pollute the airwaves around the clock and are sitting ready for a phone call to jump into action. What is needed from civil society is to reclaim the airwaves and to demand that, publicly owned

and governmentally regulated through the FCC as they are, they should not be used to spread racism, bigotry and Islamophobia. In reality, we must explore ways to engage in a systematic legal challenge to the ability of racists to use public resources in order to spread their brand of bigotry, since we all collectively own the airwaves and rent them to media outlets and companies on the understanding that they are to be utilized for the general good. Racism should be defined as the process of disrupting human potential and it should have no place on a publicly owned resource.

What we are facing at present is the work of Islamophobes who cast a long shadow of doubt on Muslims by polluting the airwaves and social media around the clock. What is needed from civil society is to reclaim the space of knowledge and communication. Combatting racism is a process of disrupting the ability of individuals and institutions to restrict or diminish the human potential and it should have no place on a publicly owned resource. I am always reminded of the imprint on Malcolm X's mind when English teacher, Mr. Ostrowski, denying him the ability to dream of becoming a lawyer and stating that his future should be in carpentry, not that anything wrong with being a carpenter but it was not Malcolm's dream or aspiration.

In other words, the end game for any Islamophobic media campaign has never been to ensure the general public safety for everyone. Instead, it is to ensure an environment where no one is safe so long as a Muslim is walking amongst us; where a mosque is simply headquarters radical violence; where Muslim families are breeding grounds for new terrorists; and where no community in America is safe so long as one Muslim walks freely.

Responsibility, courage and leadership are demanded from those in positions of power and influence, be it in government, civil society, the media, or religious institutions; they must speak out to counter the vitriolic and Islamophobic attacks directed at the Muslim community. Silence in the face of racism is consent to it, and will only embolden those who use it to advance their own distorted vision of our society. The problem is real and immediate, and collective attention

is demanded to prevent verbal racism from leading to violence, which has already taken place against Sikh and Muslims alike.