

A Question of “Rights” vs. “What is Right:” A Textual Analysis of the Anti-Defamation League’s and President Barack Obama’s Statements Regarding the Proposed Islamic Center near Ground Zero

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This article examines the controversy over a proposed Islamic community center and mosque near Ground Zero in New York City through a close textual analysis of two statements: President Barack Obama’s remarks at the 2010 Iftar Dinner in support of the center, and a press release by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a well-known anti-bigotry group, against the center. While both rhetors acknowledge the tradition of freedom of religion in the US and display deference to the emotions of 9/11 victims and families, Obama prioritizes legal principles while the ADL prioritizes a victimhood perspective. These differences parallel the Aristotelian artistic proofs.

Introduction

In December 2009, *The New York Times* reported that the former Burlington Coat Factory, located two blocks from Ground Zero had been bought for the purposes of building an Islamic center and mosque (Blumenthal & Mowjood, 2009). However, it wasn’t until May of the following year, when the building plan was approved, that the news media began covering the issue extensively (Dewitt, 2010; Hernandez, 2010, May 26; Jackson & Hutchinson, 2010; “New York’s fury at plans for Ground Zero mosque,” 2010; Smith, 2010). As Ground Zero is the site of the 9/11 terrorist attack that occurred in Lower Manhattan in 2001, the issue immediately ignited controversy, with people on both sides of the debate exchanging angry words. Some suggested that building the Islamic center near Ground Zero would help to heal the wounds of 9/11 (Hernandez, 2010, May 26; “New York’s fury at plans for Ground Zero mosque,” 2010). Others argued that building a mosque near Ground Zero might be viewed by terrorists as another victory (Harper, 2010; Wyatt, 2010). The debate set off a barrage of offensive and bigoted

language directed toward the Muslim community within the United States (“1,000 protest Islamic Center plan,” 2010; Vitello, 2010, June 11). At the height of the debate, both President Obama and the Anti-Defamation League issued important public statements that revealed both logical and emotional arguments for and against the proposed center and mosque.

Two of the most prominent arguments advanced in this heated public debate are centered on 1) the First Amendment right to freedom of religion; and 2) sensitivity to the emotions of 9/11 victims and family members, as well as other Americans emotionally affected by 9/11. Many proponents of the proposed mosque and Islamic center argue that preventing the construction of the Islamic center would violate the First Amendment of the Constitution, which guarantees citizens the right to freely practice the religion of their choice. Opponents argue, however, that because the terrorists who planned and executed the 9/11 attack were Muslim, it would be offensive to 9/11 families to build an Islamic center so close to Ground Zero. In the words of one detractor, it “is simply wrong. It is disrespectful. [And] it is astoundingly insensitive” (Burke, 2010, p. A20).

The controversy sparked an intense and vociferous public debate. Many protests took place against the Islamic center, and violent threats were expressed against the developers. However, there was also an outpouring of support for the center from local and national religious leaders of many different faiths (Hernandez, 2010, August 19; Lowenfeld, 2010) in solidarity against restrictions on the freedom of religious expression. Some political leaders supported the center, while others publicly questioned its location and the intentions of those funding it (Hernandez, 2010, May 26; 2010, July 14). Among the many politicians and political groups making statements regarding the proposed Islamic center and mosque were President Barack Obama and the well-known anti-bigotry group, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

Through close textual analysis of the logical and emotional arguments in President Barack Obama's Remarks at the 2010 Iftar Dinner and the Anti-Defamation League's Statement of the Proposed Islamic Community Center at Ground Zero, this article suggests that both President Obama and the ADL recognize the logical and emotional arguments surrounding the proposed Islamic center. However, each prioritizes the two arguments differently. President Obama places the tradition of freedom of religion as the most important matter concerning the center, basing his arguments on rational, legal principles historically grounded in American constitutional law and the American ideals of religious and racial tolerance and diversity. In doing so, he advances an argument based in the Aristotelian artistic proof of *logos*. The ADL, alternatively, stresses that the emotions of 9/11 families, within a victimhood perspective that privileges concern for victims' subjective experience of emotional pain and suffering, should take priority over the freedom of religion or rational principles in this case. The ADL relies on the Aristotelian artistic proof of *pathos* to convince the audience of its argument. This essay argues that the debate over whether the Islamic community center and mosque should be built near Ground Zero comes down to a contest between "rights" and "what is right" – the "right" to build the center, as compared to "what is right;" namely, what is sensitive and appropriate from the perspective of victims.

We have chosen to compare and analyze these two statements for two reasons. First, both President Obama and the ADL are well-known for their promotion of tolerance and respect. Throughout his career as Senator of Illinois and to some extent during his first three years as President, Barack Obama gained a reputation for working with both his supporters and his opponents for the good of the country (Sabar, 2008; Obama 2009). The ADL similarly has a long history of fostering intergroup relations in order to promote respect for all groups in the United

States. The ADL was founded in 1913 "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all" and is now committed to fighting "all forms of bigotry" (American Defamation League, 2011), including anti-Islamic sentiment (Barbaro, 2010). Both Obama and the ADL have publically denounced bigotry and extremism, as illustrated in their statements regarding the proposed Islamic Center. Second, both Obama's statement and the ADL's statement recognize the same arguments regarding the proposed Islamic center and mosque, and both condemn the bigoted language that some have used in reference to this issue. However, despite these similarities, Obama and the ADL come to very different conclusions about the construction of the Islamic center and mosque.

Theoretical Framework

How can reason and persuasion be used to convince the public of what should happen in this situation, given the tensions between "rights" based in the rational, legal principles of religious tolerance and "what is right," based on sensitivity to the subjective experience of emotional suffering? We look first to Aristotle's fundamental discussion of the artistic proofs. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle (2007) explains that there are *entechnic* or artistic proofs a speaker can use to persuade his/her audience: *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos* (p. 38). *Logos* is an appeal to the listeners' sense of logic and reasoning. Kennedy, in his translation of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, tells us that while *logos* translates to "what is said," Aristotle often refers to *logos* as "the reason or argument inherent in speech" (p. 38). Kennedy describes *logos* as an "inductive or deductive argument" (p. 15). The use of *logos*, however, is not merely the stating of facts, statistics, and other evidence, but rather a means of using such evidence in an artistic way in order to persuade an audience.

Aristotle also notes that persuasion exists when hearers “are led to feel emotion by the speech” (p. 39). *Pathos* is an appeal to the audience’s emotions. Aristotle notes that people give different judgments when they feel different emotions (p. 39). *Pathos*, or “the emotions,” Aristotle tells us, are “those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgments and which are accompanied by pain and pleasure, for example, anger, pity, fear, and other such things and their opposites” (p. 113). In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses many different emotions, including anger, calmness, friendliness, friendship, enmity, hate, fear, confidence, shame, shamelessness, kindness, pity, indignation, envy, and emulation (p. 116-147).

The third artistic proof, *ethos*, refers to the apparent credibility of the speaker; Aristotle notes that it occurs when “the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence” (p. 38). According to Aristotle, a speaker should exhibit a sense of practicality, and be able to be fair-minded. Furthermore, he/she should be of virtuous character and offer advice for what he/she believes will be best for the community.

President Obama and the ADL both use *logos* and *pathos* in their statements. Furthermore, both seem to agree on which argument is primarily logical, based on Constitutional rights and freedoms, and which is primarily emotional, based on sympathy for those who lost loved ones. It is also important to note that while one argument is *logos*-dominated and the other is *pathos*-dominated, neither argument is completely void of the other artistic proof. As Johnstone (1980) aptly notes, “practical judgment, as an activity of the calculative intellect, involves an interplay of reason and desire” (p. 7). The *logos*-dominated argument concerning the tradition of freedom of religion may indeed evoke emotion in some people, while the *pathos*-dominated argument focusing on the emotions of 9/11 families may seem quite logical to some

people. Every argument contains *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, but one element may be more prominent; indeed, in the cases of the statements made by the ADL and President Obama, one artistic proof appears to stand out more than the others.

The *logos*-dominated argument is centered on upholding the freedom of religion and the rights of U.S. citizens. Both the ADL and President Obama note the importance of freedom of religion to American democracy. Both observe that legally, the builders have every right to construct the Islamic center and mosque, and that Al-Qaeda Islamic extremists, not all Muslims or Islam in general, are responsible for the death and destruction that occurred on 9/11. Furthermore, both denounce the bigoted language that has surrounded this issue, thus calling for a commitment to respect and tolerance.

The emotionally-driven argument centers around the feelings of 9/11 families and victims. Both Obama and the ADL recognize that some 9/11 families and victims may be apprehensive about a mosque being constructed so close to Ground Zero. Ground Zero has come to be memorialized within American culture as “sacred space” or “sacred ground,” much like other sites of war or catastrophes (Jacobs, 2004; Donofrio, 2010; Selby, 2002). As described by Selby (2002), the term “sacred space” denotes an area that has been symbolically and/or physically set apart from other places, made special and unique, and endowed with symbolic meaning, emotional sentiments, and collectively-held memories. Sacred space is constructed in distinct contrast to “the profane,” and is protected from profane activities or associations that would pollute the sanctity of such a space (Durkheim, 1995[1912]). Ground Zero is also experienced as what Maria Tumarkin (2005) calls a “traumascape:” Simultaneously a symbolic and spatial place marked by traumatic legacies of violence, suffering, and loss, in which the past is never quite over. In a traumascape, “Years, decades after the event, the past is still unfinished

business. Full of visual and sensory triggers, capable of eliciting a whole palette of emotions, traumascapes catalyze and shape remembering and reliving of traumatic events. It is through these places that the past...continues to refashion the present” (Tumarkin, 2005, p. 12).

Within the United States, a collective memory of victimization and trauma associated with 9/11 is pervasive; “victimhood nationalism” has become part of the national historical imagination through ceremonies and rituals of memorialization associated with 9/11 (Lim, 2010). For victims’ families, 9/11 is also a personal experience of loss and suffering; in the victimhood perspective, the 9/11 families are “true victims” who are innocent, helpless, and “fit the readily available templates of sacrifice, martyrdom, and injury” (Cole, 2007, p. 14). Moreover, collective memory of trauma is ahistorical; emotions associated with the trauma often remain strong years after the event.

With respect to Ground Zero, both President Obama and the ADL affirm that the healing process is still continuing almost 10 years after the tragedy. However, while the two speakers find some overlap in their logical and emotional arguments concerning the proposed Islamic center, they significantly disagree on which argument should carry more weight. This important difference will be discussed in the following analyses and in the discussion section of this article.

Analysis of the Anti-Defamation League’s Statement on the Islamic Community Center near Ground Zero

The ADL released a surprising statement regarding the proposed Islamic Center on July 28, 2010. As the “nation’s premier civil rights/human relations agency” (The Anti-Defamation League, 2011), the ADL was expected by many to fight for the Muslim community’s right to construct the center near Ground Zero (Barbaro, 2010). When ADL national director Abraham Foxman stated in an interview that the group had determined that the Islamic Center and mosque

should be built a mile further away from Ground Zero because the proposed location was offensive to families of 9/11 victims, other interfaith and human rights groups criticized the decision (Barbaro, 2010). The president of the Interfaith Alliance, C. Welton Gaddy, called the conclusion “disappointing,” while the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership’s co-president Rabbi Irwin Kula declared “The ADL should be ashamed of itself” (Barbaro, 2010).

The statement released on the ADL website appears to attempt to find middle ground on an issue that has infuriated many on both sides. It is written in an indirect pattern, which Mary Ellen Guffey (2008) defines as “presenting a message with details, explanations, and evidence first, followed by the main idea” (p. G-6). This organization allows for the surprising news of denouncing the proposed construction site to be softened by general statements of agreement. General statements of agreement allow for an immediate audience connection, which is related to *pathos* in that they allow the audience to be in a particular state of mind that is beneficial to the rhetor (Aristotle, 2007, p. 113). Before discussing their decision, the ADL begins with two general statements of agreement: Support for the freedom of religion and a condemnation of bigotry.

First, the ADL addresses the issue of religious freedom. They state, “We regard freedom of religion as a cornerstone of the American democracy, and that freedom must include the right of all Americans – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faiths – to build community centers and houses of worship” (The Anti-Defamation League, 2012). The word “cornerstone” conjures up images of a building’s foundation – an interesting metaphor for a statement regarding a proposed building. Just as cornerstones are essential to the structure of a building, “cornerstones” of American democracy are essential to the well-being of American citizens. By using the word “cornerstone,” the ADL recognizes freedom of religion as one of the essential concepts on which

the United States was founded. Furthermore, this statement provides a connection between the ADL and the audience. Both proponents and opponents of the proposed Islamic center are likely to agree that freedom of religion grants all Americans of all faiths the right to build houses of worship. By offering this first general statement of agreement, the ADL is able to establish a connection with its audience before announcing their surprising decision.

Second, the ADL admonishes religious bigotry. In the next sentence, they state “We categorically reject appeals to bigotry on the basis of religion, and condemn those whose opposition to this proposed Islamic Center is a manifestation of such bigotry” (The Anti-Defamation League, 2012). This general statement of agreement accomplishes two purposes for the ADL. First, like the previous statement, it creates a connection between the ADL and others who are appalled by the bigoted language surrounding this issue. Second, it allows the ADL to separate themselves from those who reject the proposed center for bigoted reasons. Because the ADL’s statement later announces their decision to reject the proposed center and mosque, it is essential that they clarify that they are not doing so out of bigotry or fear of a particular religious group. By stating this first, they are able to separate themselves from the bigoted comments surrounding the issue, which allows them to lead into their announcement without the concern that some may think the ADL is supporting bigoted fears.

In their next statement, they provide a reservation, to use Toulmin’s (2003) words,¹ in order to switch gears and announce their decision not to support the proposed mosque and Islamic center. They explain, “However, there are understandably strong passions and keen sensitivities surrounding the World Trade Center site. We are ever mindful of the tragedy which befell our nation there, the pain we all still feel – and especially the anguish of the families and friends of those who were killed on September 11, 2001” (The Anti-Defamation League, 2012).

These statements use strong, descriptive language in order to create *pathos*. “Strong passions and keen sensitivities” alert the reader that this is an issue where emotion plays a prominent role. The words “pain” and “anguish” tug at the heartstrings of the audience, invoking sympathy.

Furthermore, this statement provides a connection between all Americans and the ADL by using the terms “our” and “we.” “A tragedy that befell our nation” is one that affects all Americans, not simply New Yorkers, or family members of the victims. Also, by stating that the pain that surrounds us regarding 9/11 is one that “we all still feel,” the ADL connects themselves and all Americans by drawing on the nation-wide collective memory of victimization as Americans.

After this statement, the ADL makes its announcement: “The controversy which has emerged regarding the building of an Islamic Center at this location is counterproductive to the healing process. Therefore, under these unique circumstances, we believe the City of New York would be better served if an alternative location could be found” (The Anti-Defamation League, 2012). Using the justification of promoting healing, the ADL suggests that the proposed Islamic center should not be built because it would be “counterproductive to the healing process.” This statement prioritizes the emotions of 9/11 families, recognizing that to them, this area constitutes sacred space.

Like other sacred space sites, such as burial grounds and national memorials, only certain language and uses are considered appropriate in and around Ground Zero (Donofrio, 2010; Low, 2004). The ADL’s statement suggests that an Islamic center and mosque would violate the sacredness of Ground Zero because it may offend the loved ones of 9/11 victims. As “the sacred” is always symbolically constructed against the concept of “the profane” (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]), symbols identified as “profane” are perceived to violate the sacred nature of that space (Selby, 2002). Because some 9/11 families may consider the proposed mosque as a profane

symbol due to the religion of the terrorists who caused 9/11, the ADL argues that it should be built elsewhere.

In their final paragraph of the statement, the ADL explains this decision to privilege the emotions of 9/11 families over Constitutional rights. They note,

Proponents of the Islamic Center may have every right to build at this site, and may even have chosen the site to send a positive message about Islam. The bigotry some have expressed in attacking them is unfair and wrong. But ultimately this is not a question of rights, but a question of what is right. In our judgment, building an Islamic Center in the shadow of the World Trade Center will cause some victims more pain – unnecessarily – and that is not right.

In this statement, the ADL recognizes that, logically, according to the Constitution, proponents of the Islamic center and mosque should be permitted to build where they see fit. Similarly, they again denounce the bigotry associated with the issue. However, they suggest that *pathos* trumps *logos* in their third sentence. In claiming that the issue is “not a question of rights, but a question of what is right,” the ADL suggests that the emotions of Americans and 9/11 families should determine the outcome of the debate. In the eyes of the ADL, anything that will “unnecessarily cause some victims more pain” is wrong and should not be done, despite what the Constitution may say.

Analysis of Barack Obama’s Remarks at the 2010 Iftar Dinner

On August 13, 2010, President Obama spoke at an annual dinner in the White House State Dining Room in celebration of the Islamic holy month, Ramadan. In his speech, he addressed the issue of the proposed Islamic center at Ground Zero, taking a stand for what he defines as religious freedom and also opening himself up to criticism from opponents of the

proposed center. Although Obama's rhetoric has been examined by many communication and rhetoric scholars (Atwater, 2007; Coe & Reitzes, 2010; Enck-Wanzer, 2011; Frank, 2009; Frank & McPhail, 2005; Hollander, 2010; Jenkins & Cos, 2010; Murphy, 2011; Reyes, 2011; Rowland & Jones, 2007, 2011; Sheckels, 2010; Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010; Terrill, 2009), researchers have yet to study his speech at the 2010 Iftar Dinner.

Like the ADL, President Obama begins his remarks with a general statement of agreement. This statement of agreement is rooted in American Civil Religion, which Toolin (1983) defines as "a belief system that draws upon the religious ideologies and common historical experiences of the American people, unifying diverse peoples into one people and interpreting and giving meaning to their shared existence by putting that existence into a common frame of reference" (p. 39). Originally coined by Robert N. Bellah (1988), American Civil Religion is derived from Christianity because Christianity is the most widely-practiced religion in the United States, but it differs significantly from Christianity in that there is no reference to a specific deity, prophets or other religious figures such as Christ, Saint Paul, or Elijah. In this statement, President Obama notes that the Iftar dinner is part of a White House celebratory tradition that includes "Christmas parties and Seders and Diwali celebrations" (Obama, 2010). He goes on to explain, "These events celebrate the role of faith in the lives of the American people. They remind us of the basic truth that we are all children of God, and we all draw strength and a sense of purpose from our beliefs." By focusing on the commonalities among different religious groups, Obama is able to connect with a myriad of audience members. Drawing on American Civil Religion, Obama is careful to use the term "God" when referring to the Higher Being, rather than "Christ," "Allah," "Yahweh," or any other name that would indicate a particular religion and thus break the connection he seeks to form between all

Americans. Just as the ADL uses general statements of agreement to soften the announcement of their surprising statement, Obama uses a general statement of agreement in order to create a connection before announcing his decision on the matter, with which many people may disagree.

Next, Obama uses American history to provide a framework through which to view the proposed Islamic center at Ground Zero debate. By discussing the nation's Founding Fathers' views on freedom of religion, Obama uses an indirect pattern to justify his conclusion, which will be announced later in the speech. He states,

Our Founders understood that the best way to honor the place of faith in the lives of our people was to protect their freedom to practice religion. In the Virginia Act of Establishing Religion Freedom, Thomas Jefferson wrote that 'all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion.' The First Amendment of our Constitution established the freedom of religion as the law of the land. And that right has been upheld ever since. Indeed, over the course of history, religion has flourished within our borders precisely because Americans have had the right to worship as they choose – including the right to believe in no religion at all. And it is a testament to the wisdom of our Founders that America remains deeply religious – a nation where the ability of peoples of different faiths to coexist peacefully and with mutual respect for one another stands in stark contrast to the religious conflict that persists elsewhere around the globe.

Obama's citation of Jefferson's writing is not merely a history lesson – it serves as evidence for Obama's later argument: That the proposed mosque and Islamic center should be built. By explaining how our Founding Fathers viewed freedom of religion (and perhaps romanticizing their views), Obama introduces a tradition of tolerance into the debate. He goes further to

explain that it is this tradition that makes America great in the current era, and that it is this tradition that allows America to stand in “stark contrast to the religious conflict that persists elsewhere around the globe.”

Obama then introduces the proposed Islamic center issue without taking a stand right away, which contributes to his indirect pattern and continues to build connections with his audience. He notes that religion in America is not without controversy, and then turns his audience’s attention to the issue concerning Ground Zero:

Recently, attention has been focused on the construction of mosques in certain communities – particularly New York. Now, we must all recognize and respect the sensitivities surrounding the development of Lower Manhattan. The 9/11 attacks were a deeply traumatic event for our country. And the pain and the experience of suffering by those who lost loved ones is just unimaginable. So I understand the emotions that this issue engenders. And Ground Zero is, indeed, hallowed ground.

Immediately after introducing the subject, Obama points out the role that emotion plays in the debate. He notes that many people are sensitive about the issue because Ground Zero is “hallowed ground.” Obama uses strong words like “traumatic,” “pain,” and “suffering,” to emphasize the severity of the emotions regarding this issue. Furthermore, by stating that Ground Zero is “hallowed ground,” he recognizes that many regard Ground Zero as sacred space.

Interestingly, Obama uses the word “traumatic” to explain the nation’s feelings regarding 9/11, but he separates this from the feelings of 9/11 families, whose “pain and experience of suffering” is “unimaginable.” To Obama, the emotions of 9/11 families are to be especially considered because of their loss. This stands in stark contrast to the ADL’s statement, which uses the pronouns “we” and “our” to show that the nation itself is still in mourning, not just those

who lost loved ones in the terrorist attack. Instead, Obama attempts to separate the nation from those who lost loved ones in the attack. He notes that their emotions are “unimaginable” to those who have not experienced such a tragic loss. This is not uncommon among presidents; one may note a similar disconnect in President Bill Clinton’s Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial Prayer Service Address that allows Clinton to sympathize with victims’ families without claiming a false empathy (Schrader, 2009). However, in Obama’s speech, the use of disconnect serves to introduce his *logos*-dominated argument: That the proposed Islamic center and mosque should be allowed to be built.

The explanation of America’s history of religious freedom combined with the recognition of the emotions felt by those who lost loved ones at Ground Zero allows Obama to launch into his announcement: That he supports the construction of the proposed Islamic center at Ground Zero. He makes his point in no uncertain terms:

But let me be clear. As a citizen, and as President, I believe that Muslims have the same right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country. And that includes the right to build a place of worship and a community center on private property in Lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and ordinances. This is America. And our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country and that they will not be treated differently by their government is essential to who we are. The writ of the Founders must endure.

First, Obama makes it clear that he is making this statement as a representative of the United States by emphasizing his role as a citizen and President. This provides the statement with *ethos* and allows him to justify his decision: He is not merely a person with an opinion; he is a representative of the country whose duty is to uphold the Constitution.

Second, Obama justifies his conclusion by referencing the history he has already explained to the audience. He maintains that the Founders intended for every American citizen to have the right to worship where and how they like, and that to deny the builders of the proposed mosque the right to do this is directly opposing what the Founding Fathers intended. Using tradition as his basis, Obama creates a *logos*-dominated argument that places Constitutional rights above emotions of mourners.

This *logos*-dominated argument is further illustrated in his next few statements, but it is first introduced by another general statement of agreement. He begins by recognizing that “we must never forget those who we lost so tragically on 9/11, and we must always honor those who led the response to that attack – from the firefighters who charged up smoke-filled staircases, to our troops who are serving in Afghanistan today.” By first paying respect to those who “led the response to the attack,” Obama creates another connection to the audience. Though audience members may hold different beliefs regarding the handling of 9/11 or the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, most Americans support the brave men and women of the armed forces who risk their lives for other citizens. Obama highlights this connection, which may very well evoke emotion in the audience, just before launching into another *logos* appeal – defining America’s friends and enemies.

Obama reminds his audience to “remember who we’re fighting and what we’re fighting for.” “Our enemies respect no religious freedom,” Obama tells us, implying that one criterion through which friends and enemies must be judged is their respect of American freedom of religion. This criterion allows him to further define the nation’s friends and enemies: “Al Qaeda’s cause is not Islam – it’s a gross distortion of Islam. These are not religious leaders – they’re terrorists who murder innocent men and women and children. In fact, Al Qaeda has

killed more Muslims than people of any other religion – and that list of victims includes innocent Muslims who were killed on 9/11.”

Here, Obama separates the murderous Islamic extremists of Al Qaeda from peace-loving Islamic religious leaders. He reminds his audience that it is Al Qaeda who is the enemy, not Islam. By defining the enemy and reminding Americans that Muslims are friends, Obama further justifies why the proposed Islamic center should be built on Ground Zero. Using *logos*, he suggests that peaceful Muslims should not be punished for the murderous actions of people who distort their religion.

Furthermore, Obama uses a startling fact to create a connection between Muslim Americans and non-Muslim Americans: He notes that Al Qaeda has killed more Muslims than people of any other religion. This accomplishes two purposes. First, it creates a connection between Muslim Americans and non-Muslim Americans, as does his following statement which notes that many Muslim Americans died in the 9/11 attack. The 9/11 terrorist attack joins all Americans, no matter their religion, together as victims and survivors. Second, it frames the enemy in a way that is contrary to their own self-proclamations. Al Qaeda has claimed to launch a jihad against those who are not Muslims. Obama tells his audience that this is not true: Al Qaeda has launched attacks on more people of their own religion than on people of other religions. With this statement, Obama frames the enemy as a ruthless murderous force that kills innocent people of all faiths, and thus separates Al Qaeda from the Muslim community. Obama then charges his audience to fight the enemy by exercising tolerance and respecting those who are different from them. He notes that it is this that separates Americans from “the nihilism of those who attacked us on that September morning, and who continue to plot against us today.”

This call to action plays on the audience's desire to beat the enemy as well as to respect other faiths.

Later in the speech, Obama reminds the audience that the debate concerning the proposed Islamic center and mosque is not "unique to our time." He notes that "past eras have seen controversies about the construction of synagogues or Catholic churches." Indeed, he is correct. Paul Vitello (2010, October 7) notes in a *New York Times* article that a similar controversy concerning Lower Manhattan's St. Peter's Catholic Church existed in the late eighteenth century. Similar situations regarding the construction of synagogues have been reported by *The New York Times* as well, although many of these controversies lack anti-Semitic sentiment, unlike the Islamophobia found in the debate over the proposed Islamic center near Ground Zero (Berger, 2003; Lomuscio, 1996; Medina, 2004, Vandam, 2006). Obama's claim that controversy surrounding a proposed place of worship in Manhattan is nothing new is well supported by previous instances. Obama further notes that "time and again, the American people have demonstrated that we can work through these issues, and stay true to our core values and emerge stronger for it. So it must be – and will be – today."

Finally, Obama notes that Muslims have always been part of the history of America. He tells his audience, "Like so many other immigrants, generations of Muslims came to forge their future here. They became farmers and merchants, worked in mills and factories. They helped lay the railroads. They helped build America." With these statements, Obama suggests that Muslim Americans have similar backgrounds to non-Muslim Americans. Just as an Irish American may have an ancestor who worked in a factory, and a Jewish American may have an ancestor who was a farmer, so a Muslim American may have an ancestor who experienced these same things. Obama also notes that the first Islamic center was founded in New York in the 1890s, the first

mosque was built in North Dakota, and that the oldest surviving mosque is in Cedar Rapids. By noting the construction of these buildings, Obama implies that the proposed center at Ground Zero is no different and that building it would be part of the American tradition of exercising the First Amendment.

Finally, Obama closes his speech by talking about the many contributions of Muslim Americans today. He notes that Muslim Americans serve the country as police officers, firefighters, and soldiers. This furthers his argument that Muslim Americans are just like any other group of Americans, and should be respected and given the same rights, including the right to build a house of worship in Manhattan. He also notes that “Muslim American clerics have spoken out against terror and extremism, reaffirming that Islam teaches that one must save human life, not take it.” This statement further supports Obama’s previous arguments that Islam is a religion of love, not hate. It also implies that if the proposed mosque is built, it will be a place to worship God, not a place to harbor terrorism. He summarizes that Muslim Americans have played an important role in American history and that Islam is one of many faiths that allow Americans to exercise their First Amendment right, maintain their values, and “perfect our union.”

Like the ADL, Obama uses connection to audience members to inform and persuade his audience. Obama’s argument concerning the tradition of freedom of religion may very well evoke emotion and a sense of duty in many audience members. However, Obama’s argument is primarily *logos*-dominated. Using tradition as his basis, he reminds audience members that the Constitution grants freedom of religion to all Americans, and that freedom of religion applies to Muslim Americans’ desire to build a mosque two blocks from Ground Zero. He then separates Islam from the distorted extremist views of Al Qaeda, assuring his audience that Islam is a

religion that teaches love and the value of life, not hate and the destruction of innocent people. Using facts and citing the Founding Fathers, Obama creates a *logos*-dominated prima-facie argument in favor of the proposed Islamic center and mosque.

Discussion

This essay examined two statements on the controversy of the proposed Islamic center and mosque at Ground Zero: The Anti-Defamation League's Statement of the Proposed Islamic Community Center at Ground Zero and Barack Obama's Remarks at the 2010 Iftar Dinner. While both arguments contain *logos* and *pathos*, the ADL's statement emphasizes *pathos* while President Obama's statement emphasizes *logos*. The ADL privileges the collective identity of Americans and 9/11 survivors as victims of trauma, concluding that the proposed center should not be built because "it is not right." The ADL's statement invites readers to identify with the emotions of 9/11 families, based on a subjective appreciation of emotional victimization. In contrast, Obama places priority on the American historical tradition of upholding the First Amendment, concluding that the center should be built as a testament to American freedom of religion and the principles of religious and racial tolerance and diversity.

We would be remiss if we did not note the role that *ethos* plays in this analysis. Clearly, a civil rights organization and the American president play different roles in this controversy. While both may emphasize the importance of respect and tolerance, each is accountable to different entities, and each has different interests in mind. The ADL, as one of the leading civil rights organizations in the country, wants to denounce bigotry but also recognizes the role of victim's emotions in this debate. This is likely due to the ADL's unique position as an organization that was formed due to anti-Semitism. In 1913, the ADL formed in order to fight against "rampant anti-Semitism and discrimination against Jews" (The Anti-Defamation League,

2011). Because of their roots, many members and leaders of the ADL may have lost loved ones in the Holocaust. Indeed, this is the case for Abraham Foxman, the ADL's National Director, who is a Holocaust survivor and lost 14 family members in the Holocaust. These members may feel a strong connection to 9/11 families because of their similar loss. The Holocaust may serve as a continuing referent for their experience. This may allow them to identify with those who lost loved ones on 9/11 in a way that others may not. They occupy a special role in that they can empathize – rather than sympathize – with the 9/11 families' emotions. Moreover, the Holocaust “provides an unrivaled *moral clarity* in historical representation” (MacDonald, 2007, p. 3, italics in original) within American culture, a universal symbol through which we can frame tragedy and loss, thus adding to the *ethos* of the ADL in speaking about the Islamic cultural center and mosque.

President Obama, however, likely takes a different stance because of his role as the chief representative of the entire nation. One of the many duties of the United States President is to uphold the Constitution – and this includes guaranteeing all Americans equal rights. He is responsible for representing all Americans, not merely the victims or the victims' families, as the ADL does. This may have led to Obama's decision to argue through *logos* that the Islamic center near Ground Zero must be supported on account of the freedom of religion promised to all Americans in the First Amendment. The President's position also accounts for his use of historical context in presenting his argument.

With respect to *ethos*, we must also consider the issue of President Obama as a leader plagued by public questioning of his ethnic and racial background, and ongoing accusations that he is in fact a Muslim (Bazinet, 2010; Cohen & Shear, 2010). Members of what has been called “the Birther Movement” have vociferously argued that he was not born within the United States

and launched repeated requests for his “long form” birth certificate (Memoli, 2011). Continued suspicions about his religious affiliations with the Islamic community have been in the background during both his run for presidency and during his presidency itself. This background may ultimately have had an effect on his credibility within some public circles – and this speech in support of the Islamic center may have actually fueled the fire for those who continue to remain unconvinced that he is a United States citizen and a Christian (McGrane & Gorman, 2010).

It appears that in the case of the proposed Islamic center and mosque at Ground Zero that *pathos* plays as large a role as *logos* and *ethos*, if not a greater role. When the International Freedom Center (IFC) was proposed at Ground Zero, many family groups were angry with the proposal. The IFC was to be a museum and performing arts center where visitors would “learn through art and other exhibitions how the lives of the victims of September 11 were deeply connected to freedom’s evolution” (Ramirez, 2005). Proponents of the IFC believed that the center would show the world that the United States values freedom and culture, and that the issue was one concerning the freedom of speech (Dunlap, 2005, September 8; Rips, 2005). Lawyer Michael Rips (2005), who supported the IFC, called the rejection of the center “a serious blow to the First Amendment” (p. 13). In contrast, a number of family groups believed that a museum on Ground Zero would be inappropriate because it is sacred ground, and some feared that the political content of the museum might be “anti-American” (Dunlap, 2005, September 23; Fernandez, 2005). Victims’ families feared that “a center devoted broadly to global human rights would detract from the centrality of the memorial planned there for their loved ones” (Pogrebin, 2005, p. 1).

Just as with the current Islamic center controversy, the controversy concerning the IFC centered on two main arguments, one *logos*-dominated and the other *pathos*-dominated. Those who argued in favor of the IFC suggested that a museum encouraging freedom and culture would be a positive development, and often cited freedom of speech in the First Amendment as a reason for why the IFC should be built. Similarly, as we have seen, the statement of freedom of religion in the First Amendment serves as support for the arguments made by proponents of the Islamic center, illustrated in President Obama's Remarks at the 2010 Iftar Dinner. Also, in both cases, the emotions of victims' families provides support for opponents' arguments. Families' sentiments were taken into consideration regarding the IFC, and ultimately, these emotions played a starring role in the defeat of both the proposed museum and the Islamic cultural center. Furthermore, these same emotions concerning what should and should not be built near Ground Zero dominated the discourse about the proposed Islamic center, as illustrated by the ADL's Statement of the Proposed Islamic Community Center at Ground Zero.

We suggest that victims' families' emotions will always play a role in negotiating proposed construction on or near Ground Zero. On account of the great loss they experienced there, families want to express their opinions about the use of Ground Zero, and many are protective of the land where their loved ones perished. We believe that *pathos* will always play a dominant role regarding Ground Zero and its surroundings. Future research may examine the discourse concerning these controversies through other rhetorical lenses.

The proposed Islamic Center near Ground Zero raises many questions: Questions over whether the United States is a nation still in mourning, questions over the extent to which that victimization can be extended, both in terms of physical and symbolic space, and questions regarding whether the fundamental tenets of the nation's constitutional commitment to freedom

of religion ultimately supersede the strong emotions associated with 9/11. Perhaps in order to find an acceptable solution to the Islamic center debate, leaders and citizens must consider both the *pathos*-driven arguments and the *logos*-driven arguments in conjunction with each other. Perhaps then a compromise can be found that the two sides will deem both logical and ethical.

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¹ Toulmin offers three supplemental elements – backing, reservations, and qualifiers – to complement his three essential elements of argumentation: The claim, data, and warrant. Reservations are arguments that are counter to the original claim. In this case, the word “however” signifies that a reservation is about to be announced.