

# FREEDOMISM

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## *Randomly generated opinions*

One of the most heated political debates currently raging in the United States — and for seemingly no valid reason — is over the planned Park51 community center that will be constructed in Manhattan, New York City. The Islamic community center, which contains a prayer room, is attracting attention due to its proximity to Ground Zero, the famed site of the 9/11 attacks. The resulting furor from the right over the issue has fueled everything from massive protests to burnings of Islam's holy book, the Koran.

It seems that the conservative base, greatly riled up by the matter, is deeply mistaken concerning their views on the "Ground Zero mosque". Conservative commentators continuously argue that it is a "slap in the face" to Americans that a "mosque" is being constructed only four blocks from the infamous site. The outrage has resulted in some accusing Islam of being an "extremist religion" and saying that constructing an Islam-based building in the vicinity of Ground Zero is more than an issue of freedom of religion. However, the Park51 project is done entirely in good faith. The planner of the Park51 project, imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, is a devoted Muslim activist who aims to strengthen relations between the West and Islam. Park51, funded legitimately through Rauf and partnering investors, is simply a community center (complete with a food court, theater, fitness center and swimming pool) that also includes a Muslim prayer room. The Park51 nonprofit organization, dedicated to overseeing the construction of the community center, added in a statement that the Park51 building is not only an interfaith community center, but also will include a monument to those lost in the 9/11 attacks<sup>[1]</sup>. The community center is being funded and constructed entirely in good faith, and was never meant to stir up such controversy. There are already two other mosques within a 5-block vicinity of Ground Zero, one which predates the World Trade Center itself.

Therefore, no offense is meant to the families of the victims of the 9/11 attacks, nor is the community center being funded "suspiciously", as some right-wing critics have blatantly accused. Park51 is being constructed on land that is fully owned by those involved, and as such they have every right to construct whatever they desire on the property. The City of New York has already unanimously approved the continuation of the project; legally there is no way to prevent the construction of Park51. Support it or not, the community center is destined to be built anyway.

However, the conservative base — well known for being strong supporters of property rights — stress that Park51 should be cancelled to avoid "offending the 9/11 families", not all of whom are against the community center<sup>[2]</sup>. Some of this opposition is pure "Islamophobia": some more outspoken critics have compared constructing Park51 akin to building a Japanese cultural center within the vicinity of Pearl Harbor. Such comments are outrageous — the actions of a handful of extremists who acted in the name of Islam does not equate to the entire religion's followers to holding such horrific values. While the Koran does contain passages that would be considered unacceptable compared to modern values, all religions do. The Bible also has its share of disturbing sections, areas that are largely ignored or passed over by 21<sup>st</sup>-century believers. A majority of Muslims are not unlike a majority of Christians — peaceful and reasonable. Only a small fraction of Muslims are violent, as are a small fraction of Christians.

There are plenty of American Muslims, such as the imam Rauf, who wish for the West and Islam to become more understanding of each other. Unfortunately, such unreasonable bickering over issues such as Park51 stands in the way of that progress. The United States is a nation based strongly on religious freedom — many of the 13 colonies were founded by oppressed religious groups — and in order for it to keep that position, it must treat Islam equally to any other belief. Park51 presents nothing but benefits to Lower Manhattan: the community center will be a state-of-the art building that will promote religious tolerance and serve New York's Muslim population. Its construction is anything but bad, yet so many people (polls show a majority of Americans oppose Park51) remain against it because of one feature — a prayer room — that isn't even the central theme of the project. Muslims residing in the U.S. are peaceful people, and they do not deserve to be thrust into the spotlight and treated this way.

There is no legitimate reason to oppose Park51, it is being built in good faith, almost as an outstretched hand or peace towards the American population. Yet still, the people of the United States turn their back and get bitter, fed by lies and anti-Islam propaganda, injuring the West's otherwise calm relationship with Islam. There will be a day sometime in the future when the September 11 attacks will be just another event in the history books, and people will learn to respect the beliefs and rights of others. Why can't that day be today?

**CITATIONS:**

1. "Park51 - Park51 Issues a Statement Regarding the Name of the Planned Muslim Community Center Being Built in Lower Manhattan." Web log post. *Park51*. Park51, 8 Sept. 2010. Web. 12 Sept. 2010. <<http://blog.park51.org/?p=129>>.
2. "Park51." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, 12 Sept. 2010. Web. 12 Sept. 2010. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Park51#9.2F11\\_families\\_2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Park51#9.2F11_families_2)>.