Head to Head: Does mosque help or harm?

9/11 wounds re-opened by mosque

Anna Meier

It's been almost a decade since the attack on the American homeland on 9/11. In the past nine years, plans have been made and committees have been created to transform ground zero into a national memorial. Yet, when I was there this past May, ground zero still looked largely like it did the day those planes took down the two towers.

The area looks like nothing more than another construction zone, filled with rubble and dust, some machinery and orange barricades. As you step off the subway and walk down Fulton Street, it's easy to imagine what it must have looked like with the two monstrous towers looming over the city. It also is easy to imagine that a very young person could walk by without any idea of what happened there that fateful day nine years ago. What they will be able to remember is the mosque that has plans of being built.

The actual location of the mosque, about two blocks from ground zero in Lower Manhattan, was home to another building that was damaged during the September 11 attacks. When the mosque is built, therefore, there will be one more memorial to Islam and still none in the place where the twin towers once stood.

This delay in the building of a national 9/11 memorial is not the fault of radical Muslims, but the fault of an America who has had its security, spirit and economy crushed over the course of the nine years that the country has attempted to recuperate from these attacks.

However, the inability of Americans to recover is the fault of a few particular Muslims that chose to fly those planes into American buildings on 9/11, killing some 3,000 Americans. And the delay of the monument, as well as the building of a the mosque, will be the fault, again, of a few particular Muslims that re-open the wounds of 9/11 and wave their flagrant disregard in the face of America and in the faces of those families that lost its mothers, fathers, daughters and sons at the hands of a group of people claiming jihad in the name of their Islamic faith.

I recognize the fact that in America, we are given a great deal of freedoms. Freedoms earned for us by our military men and women who still are stationed in foreign countries, fighting a war with no foreseeable end. But on the cover of "The Economist," right after September 11, 2001, was the headline: "The day the world changed." And while we retain a number of freedoms, we have given up the one that we once so enjoyed, which was the freedom to believe that the United States of America is invincible, to live our lives in a manner that exploits that belief.

Maybe then, we also give up the right to be incredibly insensitive toward tragedy.

I would liken the building of this mosque to the outrageous funeral protests of the Westboro Baptist Church. Do people have a right to protest at soldiers' funerals? Sure, they do, but in the court case against the Phelps family, the District judge ruled that there are, in fact, limits on that right. The protesting family was found guilty for "infliction of emotional distress." There seems to be hardly any other reason for Sharif El-Gamal, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and Nour Mousa to be building the mosque in this precise location than infliction of emotional distress.

This also could be likened to the building of the Catholic convent at Auschwitz in the '80s. After years of controversy and meetings at Geneva, the convent eventually was moved, and the Catholic nuns inhabiting the convent were evicted from the camp after an order came from the Vatican. Catholicism as a whole is not the enemy, but the fact that so many died there in the name of the faith was important enough for the pope to recognize the necessity of removing the convent.

The fact that there is even a question of whether or not the mosque should be built at this particular space seems already to be a win for radical Muslims, and I have a feeling that our emotions are being played like a fiddle by some of those who would wish us harm. Again, it is not Islam that is inherently wrong, but rather the political message sent by this construction — a space for prayer to a god who supposedly instructed a few men to kill thousands in his name.

Ultimately, we need to appraise how much memories are worth, how deserving of respect our fellow Americans' agonizing loss is. The question here is not about rights, it's about sensibility and the idea that just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should.

Anna Meier is a senior English major from Kansas City, Mo.

Mosque acts as outlet for grieving

Toby Hausner

"Just as the strength of the Internet is chaos, so the strength of our liberty depends upon the chaos and cacophony of the unfettered speech the First Amendment protects," Judge Stewart Dalzell once said.

It appears that this concept has escaped some of us in America who seem to think that certain "unalienable rights" apply only to some. We draw arbitrary lines and claim only certain faiths or certain walks of life are acceptable.

This past week we remember the horrific catastrophe that took place in New York City and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. However, I fear that the memory of this event, for some, has been twisted to represent a polarizing event, giving our country the right to discriminate. In the past few months, much has been made of a Muslim mosque that is to be built two city blocks from ground zero.

There have been hecklers throughout the country demanding that the mosque not be built. This anti-Islamic movement is so passionate it has provoked burnings of the Qur'an — the Muslim holy book. Central to this feud is the question, who has the right to do what? Do Muslims have the right to build a mosque at ground zero? Do Americans have the right to burn a holy book of Islam? Legally speaking, the answer to both of these questions is yes. However, I view one as more distasteful than the other. Certainly building a mosque at such a sensitive sight was bound to be controversial, but I perceive the intent behind it is to unite our cultures and to clear up social misunderstandings.

The perceived religious undercurrent of the events of 9/11 is a misrepresentation of the Islamic faith. The tragedy was politically driven and not an attack of one religion against another. Just as the Qur'an burnings are not an extension of the Christian faith, so too were the events of 9/11 not an accepted display of Islamic beliefs. Intolerance breeds intolerance. We must be careful not to accelerate contention or augment hatred.

Yes, building a mosque near ground zero is an incredibly sensitive issue, but let me ask you this — if we prevent it from being built, what do we gain? Sure, we would like to be able to skirt this issue of religious fanaticism and its costs, but at what expense? How will we as a society face the issue at hand if we continue to ignore it? It is almost as if we revel in hiding from tough questions and our deep-seeded hurt. I submit to you that the problem with our current situation is that we as Americans were hurt by a group that were Islamic. We need someone to blame. But we have allocated the fault to an entire religion and not to the perpetrators responsible.

If we want our wounds to heal, we must remove the Islamic faith as the scapegoat religion and embrace the truth. As the prominent 19th century political theorist Alexis De Tocqueville once said, "America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great." We would be wise to live up to his words and do the noble act of forgiving those who have faulted us and learning the overarching lesson — intolerance and strife only fester and build as long as we allow them to do so.

I cannot help but be struck by the similarities between this situation and the school shooting in the Pennsylvanian Amish community in 2006. We should take a page from the Amish's response to the mass-murder suicide. They forgave the shooter and his family, immediately rallying around the outsiders to show their support and kindness. They knew that the deed was done and that the family bore no blame for the atrocious act. In a similar way, the Muslim community, as a whole, bears no blame for 9/11, and it is high time we accepted that fact.

There is nothing more American than the building of a mosque near ground zero. It represents everything we believe in. This is our First Amendment manifested. The sooner we embrace the inevitable creation of this mosque, the sooner our national healing can begin. If you really want to prove that you are better than the terrorists, meet their intolerance with tolerance.

Toby Hausner is a senior political science major from Kansas City, Mo.

Homesickness doesn't hinder all students

Nicola Fish

This year Truman State University welcomed 114 international students. I was one of them. So you might assume that homesickness is something I'm very familiar with. You'd be wrong.

I've been here a month now and can honestly say I haven't felt homesick, not even once.

As I'm writing this, I realize how horrible it sounds. Don't get me wrong, I love my family. And believe me, with the distance, it's easier to tolerate their quirks. There are fewer arguments, and you're too far away to be asked favors. All this leads to you viewing your family in a rose-tinted haze. I guess this is why people get homesick in the first place: Their family seems like this perfect entity that they've left behind and they're suddenly desperate to return.

I don't know how many people went home for Labor Day weekend, but my hall especially was like a ghost town. In England, Labor Day doesn't exist as a holiday, so I asked around about it and found the general consensus was that it wasn't anything special. Then why did all these people go home? I was confused. Most of the freshman had been here for less than 2 weeks! For the majority of them, homesickness already had struck.

Of course I stayed here and was greeted with looks of pity. "You must wish you were going home," they'd say, and when I answered with, "No, not really," their expression quickly changed to one of uncertainty. They were feeling the same confusion that I was: Why was this strange English girl not homesick?

The other international students didn't understand me either. Unlike them, I had the advantage of English as a first language, but was I really enjoying the food? And what about England? What about tea?

Well, firstly, I actually like the food here. It's better than what I'd get at home (sorry Dad), and what's not to love about ice cream at every meal? Secondly, I'm probably the least patriotic person I know. I feel no real ties to England and think that home is where you feel happy, not what it says on your passport.

Also, in England, there is a general gloominess over most things. People have a much more cynical view of life, and to come to a place where cynicism is in the minority was refreshing to say the least. Finally, I don't like tea. Sorry to ruin the stereotype, but I prefer coffee.

Voicing these opinions tends to increase peoples' bewildered looks and leads to the awkward "oh" before they quickly change the topic. I can't explain it myself. Believe me, I've tried. The only explanation I can come up with is that I don't really get a chance to miss my family.

My sister sends me daily e-mail updates (It used to be daily texts but she quickly got bored of asking what I had for breakfast), I Skype most of my friends and family and I have trusty snail mail for the rest. Sometimes, with things like Facebook, cell phones and e-mail, it's pretty hard not to stay in touch with people. Plus, being more than a thousand miles away means I can choose who I want to contact, meaning that my relationships with people are stronger because they can see from my efforts that I actually am interested in their lives.

Still, being as far away from home as I am, there's a certain expectation that I should at least be a little homesick. I mean, if people from St. Louis are homesick, then there must be something wrong with me. I know people who call home daily, go home every weekend and have their parents visit them regularly.

To these people I'm some kind of anomaly, but isn't one of the main points of college to be independent? Remember when you were little and you were so excited to stay up late, have ice cream for breakfast and do what you wanted? This is what college is. If it weren't for class, this would be every kid's dream. So next time you see me, don't ask if I'm homesick. I'm living the dream.

Nicola Fish is a freshman undeclared major from Consett, England.

AROUND THE QUAD

Do you ever get homesick?

"No, it got easier after I studied abroad in Scotland."

Alyssa Rathbun
junior

"Being an international student, I miss home a lot, especially the food."

Jared Zhao
sophomore

"No, I get homesick for my freedom when I do go back home."

Stephanie Baechle
senior

"No, I live at my family home in Paris, Mo."

Austin Miller
sophomore

Baldwin Hall deserves physical attention, too

John Hitzel

Baldwin Hall is rather austere compared with the rest of campus, isn't it? It lacks many amenities one might find in the residence halls, like fireplaces, new carpets, a computer lab or that brand-new, sterile aura that comes with freshly renovated, scarcely-lived in buildings. Many academic buildings don't embrace Baldwin's simple appearance either.

Magruder Hall and Ophelia Parrish Hall both share the new-age, technophilic air that springs from bold architectural choices resulting in wide-open, echo-reverberating spaces and creative geometries etched into surfaces not for function or utility but for aesthetic effect. Spiral staircases, shiny air ducts, archaeological wall exhibits and even a herpetarium reside in Magruder. Ophelia Parrish boasts an art gallery, a performance hall that recently had its acoustics tweaked and catwalk-like paths with a view and multi-story glass walls. OP also hides many obscure, if not hidden, staircases and doorways.

Barnett Hall wears a crown and scepter with an iconic crosshatched circle window and a right-angled metal thing sticking out of the north side of the building. Like others, its atrium is echoey and glass-walled and unorthodoxly titled. Barnett houses the campus television and radio stations, its own C-Store, computer-enhanced classrooms like those in Violette Hall and the Index's headquarters.

Even McClain Hall has a unique character as the administrative building grafted onto the part-language, part-humanities academic building. Its sloping causeway feels grand but restrained in a professional, buttoned-up way. What's that hole in the floor doing there? The education wing utilizes bold colors to brighten up the otherwise window-less classrooms surrounded by faculty offices. The many stuffed corkboards lining its hallways and the flyers covering professors' doorways busy up an otherwise unadorned space.

And then there's the breezeway leading into Baldwin, where you can magically go from the third floor to the second floor without using an elevator or a staircase.

Baldwin Hall is the tweed jacket with elbow patches your high school English professor wore, a non-statement about both style and status, the definition of old school, compared to the rest of campus.

Poor old Baldwin Hall.

These second floor halls are an about-to-rain shade of gray on one side and a dull off-white on the other. Though the gray is technically one big tack board, it rarely overflows with posted things, like McClain does. The air conditioning is always too cold, and the heat is always too hot. I have heard rumors from girls about giant cockroaches that occasionally emerge between the walls of the second-story bathroom. I've also seen one in the men's bathroom that wasn't tiny.

Recently, the first floor has been decarpeted, yet the hallway fails to emanate elegance, no matter how much wax is sloshed down. It's so lumpy and pitted they should have just kept the carpet. Some faded stairway lines make me think they once sported those sandpapery strips that keep shoes from slipping. Something resembling carpet glue inhabits the landings' corners.

The nearly featureless Baldwin does have some freckles. I do appreciate the tall ceilings and epic windows in a few of the north-side classrooms. That one classroom on the third floor has a cool, but questionably necessary, smartboard and creepy camera trained on the classroom. The neat monocle window inside the triangular brick array on the third floor provides a lord's view straight down Marion Street and bestows some mystique on the otherwise drab structure. That drinking fountain on the second floor in the north hallway is a beast, one of the best on campus.

Despite these features, Baldwin has to have seen better days, because now it looks worn, tired and borderline dingy.

With all the recent work done on Magruder and OP and Barnett, the fancy renovations of the residence halls and the construction of the West Campus Suites, why can't the building that most needs a face-lift get its due? It might not be screaming style or grandeur, or need to, but the state of the hall does say something about where, and in what programs, the University thinks it best to invest its seemingly limited image budget.

Humanities studies are concerned with insignificant, paltry things like the meaning and purpose of life, which often doesn't require new technology or much more than an area with seats, a chalkboard and open minds to fulfill its goals. Though there is something to be said about an unadorned, simple design that keeps the mind on task, most days it's insulting and definitely less than inspiring to look at what has not become of Baldwin Hall.

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