

# Apologists for Islam and History

by **Hugh Fitzgerald** (April 2016)

Apologists for Islam are a varied bunch – some reveal ignorance, others deploy deliberate taqiyya – but all play fast and loose with history.

Here are three examples:

## **Karen Armstrong on the Expulsion of the Moors**

*In 1492, the year that is often said to inaugurate the modern era, three very important events happened in Spain. In January, the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella conquered the city of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Europe; later, Muslims were given the choice of conversion to Christianity or exile. In March, the Jews of Spain were also forced to choose between baptism and deportation. Finally, in August, Christopher Columbus, a Jewish convert to Catholicism and a protégé of Ferdinand and Isabella, crossed the Atlantic and discovered the West Indies. One of his objectives had been to find a new route to India, where Christians could establish a military base for another crusade against Islam. As they sailed into the new world, western people carried a complex burden of prejudice that was central to their identity.*

In 1492, “the Catholic monarchs conquered Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Europe.” What then should we call all those lands in southern and eastern Europe that the Ottomans were at that very moment busy conquering and seizing, including Constantinople, the richest, most populous, most important city in all of Christendom for 800 years (taken by the Turks on a Tuesday – May 29, 1453), and the Balkans (including the then-vast Serbian lands)? And what are modern-day Albania, Greece, Rumania, Bulgaria? The Ottomans continued to press northward and westward, later seizing much of Hungary and threatening Vienna twice. Were these not parts of Europe, and was not a good deal of Europe, including what had been its most important city for a millennium, Constantinople, firmly in Muslim hands before Granada fell – and after?

But it would not do to remind readers that while the Muslim invaders and conquerors of Spain lost their last "stronghold" in Granada, other Muslim invaders and conquerors were busy at the other end of Europe, seizing lands and subjugating the native populations to the *devshirme* (the forced levy of Christian children) as well as to the *jizya* (the tax on non-Muslims) and all the other disabilities that, wherever Muslims conquered, were imposed, as part of a clearly elaborated system, and not merely the whim a ruler, on all non-Muslims.

Now having begun with that year 1492, Armstrong has a bit of a problem. It was that year that Jews were forced to be baptized or to leave. But though Granada had fallen, nothing then happened to the Muslims. In fact, they were treated with the same gentleness that all the Mudejares (Spanish Muslims) who had been defeated, in successive campaigns, were always treated by the Christian victors. Henry Lea, the pioneering historian of the Inquisition, who was hardly looking for ways to exculpate Christianity, describes the generosity with which the defeated Muslims were treated in Granada, and after the prior victories:

*It was the Jews against whom was directed the growing intolerance of the fifteenth century and, in the massacres that occurred, there appears to have been no hostility manifested against the Mudéjares. When Alfonso de Borja, Archbishop of Valencia (afterwards Calixtus III), supported by Cardinal Juan de Torquemada, urged their [the Mudejars] expulsion on Juan II of Aragon, although he appointed a term for their exile, he reconsidered the matter and left them undisturbed. So when, in 1480, Isabella ordered the expulsion from Andalusia of all Jews who refused baptism and when, in 1486, Ferdinand did the same in Aragon, they both respected the old capitulations and left the Mudéjares alone. The time-honored policy was followed in the conquest of Granada, and nothing could be more liberal than the terms conceded to the cities and districts that surrendered. The final capitulation of the city of Granada was a solemn agreement, signed November 25, 1491, in which Ferdinand and Isabella, for themselves, for their son the Infante Juan and for all their successors, received the Moors of all places that should come into the agreement as vassals and natural subjects under the royal protection, and as such to be honored and respected. Religion, property, freedom to trade, laws and customs were all guaranteed, and even renegades from Christianity among them were not to be maltreated, while Christian women marrying Moors were free*

*to choose their religion. For three years, those desiring expatriation were to be transported to Barbary at the royal expense, and refugees in Barbary were allowed to return. When, after the execution of this agreement, the Moors, with not unnatural distrust, wanted further guarantees, the sovereigns made a solemn declaration in which they swore by God that all Moors should have full liberty to work on their lands, or to go wherever they desired through the kingdoms, and to maintain their mosques and religious observances as heretofore, while those who desired to emigrate to Barbary could sell their property and depart.*

It was not until 1502, after difficulties ensued between Spanish authorities, including the famous Cardinal Ximenes (he of the Complutensian Polyglot), and the Muslims (Mudejares) that they were given the choice of expulsion or conversion. And a great many of them pretended to convert, and remained in Spain – far more Muslims were capable of engaging in dissimulation of their faith than were the hapless Jews, who were expelled, in 1492, virtually overnight. It was much later, not until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, under Philip II, that the last of the Muslims (“Moors”) in Spain were finally expelled, having before that risen in revolt more than once, and been subject to several incomplete expulsions.

Armstrong manages to smuggle in that first, rather ineffective expulsion of 1502: “later [i.e. in a different year altogether] Muslims were given the choice of Christianity or exile.” She does not add, and may not know, that Muslims in Spain after the fall of Granada in 1492 were not under any danger of expulsion, and it was only when they showed signs of refusing to integrate as asked (and it was assumed that over time they would share the Christian faith, though at first nothing was done to demand such a sign) that they were presented with the choice of expulsion or conversion. She may not know, either, that Muslims in a Spain now everywhere ruled by Christians, asked members of the ulema in North Africa (in present-day Morocco) to determine whether under Islamic law they might continue to live in Spain under non-Muslim rule. They were told that it was not licit, that it was important for them not to be ruled by non-Muslims, and that they must, therefore, return to the Muslim-ruled lands of North Africa. Such details provide a rather different slant on what Karen Armstrong offers – she takes the real tragedy, the overnight expulsion of the hapless and inoffensive

Jews, and attempts to make the reader think that the Muslims were equally inoffensive, equally harmless, and also treated with equal ferocity, as the Jews. But they were not equally inoffensive, not equally harmless, and not treated with equal ferocity. The danger of a military uprising by the Mudejares, possibly helped by Muslims from North Africa, was real, while Jews never were militarily powerful enough to pose a similar threat.

First, in 1492, comes the fall of Granada. Then, second in time, and certainly in Karen Armstrong's indignation, came the expulsion of the Jews: "In March, the Jews of Spain were also forced to choose between conversion and exile." Note how that "also" is dropped in, as if the real event, the main event, was the nonexistent (in 1492) expulsion of the Moors, which she had taken care to slip into her discussion of the Fall of Granada, so that she could diminish the significance of the expulsion of the Jews with that afterthoughtish "also."

But the Muslims were invaders and conquerors, who had been resisted for 700 years of the Reconquista, and when expelled, not all at once as were the Jews, they simply went across the Straits of Gibraltar from whence they had originally come, to live again among fellow Muslims, under Muslim rule. Armstrong never says that. Nor does she point out, as she would if she were trying to compare the quite different treatments of Jews and Muslims, that the Jews of Spain never invaded, never conquered, never represented a threat to the political or social order of Christian Spain. And when they were expelled, they were not to find refuge, like the Muslims, in lands ruled by coreligionists, but again, to be scattered, both to Ottoman domains and to Christian ones, to Salonika or Amsterdam, to be treated indifferently, or kindly, or with contumely, or worse.

Under Muslim rule, despite their sometimes horrendous treatment, as recorded by Maimonides in his "Epistle to the Yemen" (Maimonides fled Islamic Spain and reported to his coreligionists in the Yemen), the Jews managed to make important cultural contributions as translators (along with Christians), as physicians, and as poets (the name Judah Halevi comes to mind). They were perfectly willing to live in Spain under Christian rule. They posed no military or political threat, in contradistinction to the Muslims. They did nothing to deserve their expulsion. But Karen Armstrong has sympathy for the Jews only insofar as that sympathy can be transferred to the real objects of her pity, the Muslims, and she will do nothing to cause readers to recognize the difference in the two

cases, that of the Jews one of clear mistreatment, that of the Muslims a matter of geopolitical prudence. It took a full decade for the Spanish rulers and clerics to realize that the Muslims, though conquered, were not, as had been hoped, eventually going to convert to the Christian faith, and the signs they gave of continued insubmission could only disturb the Christian monarchs. It had taken 500 years for the Reconquista. Why should the Spanish Christians, now that they had been militarily victorious everywhere on the Iberian Peninsula, need to worry that the Muslims might rise in revolt when they could remove the problem once and for all?

And such local Muslim revolts did take place in Spain in the sixteenth century, but it was not until the Morisco revolt of the Alpujarras in Granada in 1568 that official attitudes hardened. That war lasted until 1570; at the end of it, Grenadan Moriscos were relocated to the interior, and scattered among "Old Christians," that is, people who were not descended from Jewish or Muslim converts to Islam, and, it was assumed, were the most trustworthy Christians of them all.

But still there were worries about the failure of hundreds of thousands of Moriscos to assimilate, and the fear that they might be in contact with Barbary pirates or the Ottomans (or even Protestants!) led the Spanish monarch in 1609 to order the expulsion of the last remaining Moriscos.

Both Jews and Moors were expelled from Spain, but not on the same date, and not at all in the same way. However determined Armstrong may be to convince us (most unconvincingly) that these were identical historical events, both prompted in her modish view by the demonization of "the Other" (a phenomenon which apparently results from the peculiar psychic deficiency of Christian Europe), they were not identical. The Moors were treated by Spanish officials much more leniently than the Jews, even though they were a greater geopolitical threat, with powerful coreligionists just across the Strait of Gibraltar in North Africa, than were the Jews, who posed no threat whatsoever. The phrase "the expulsion of the Jews and the Moors in 1492" does violence to the truth, but furthers Armstrong's desire to win sympathy for Muslims.

Armstrong has been retelling, in her inimitable fashion, the story of European Christendom's relations with Islam and with Muslims. In her retelling, the Muslims are innocent victims, and as innocent victims, likened misleadingly to

the Jews. They are also the only people who provided, in that bright shining moment of European history known as Islamic Spain, the only real tolerance and humanity to be found anywhere in Europe before the modern era, a veritable paradise of *convivencia*. It is a tough job, but Karen Armstrong proves equal to the task. And her real theme is not history, but to make Europeans feel ashamed of themselves for showing any signs of wariness or suspicion about the millions of Muslims who now live in Europe, having come among the indigenous Infidels to settle, but not, *pace* Armstrong, to settle down.

### **Barack Obama on Jefferson's "Iftar Dinner" and Muslims In America**

*"The first Muslim ambassador to the United States, from Tunisia, was hosted by President Jefferson, who arranged a sunset dinner for his guest because it was Ramadan – making it the first known iftar at the White House, more than 200 years ago."* – Barack Obama, speaking on August 14, 2010, at the "Annual Iftar Dinner" at the White House

Really? Is that what happened? Was there a "first known Iftar at the White House" given by none other than President Thomas Jefferson for the "first Muslim ambassador to the United States"? That's what Barack Obama and his dutiful speechwriters told the Muslims in attendance at what was billed as the "Annual Iftar Dinner," knowing full well that the remarks would be published for all Americans to see. Apparently Obama, and those who helped write this speech for him, and others still who vetted it, found nothing wrong with attempting, as part of the administration's policy of both trying to win Muslim hearts and Muslim minds and to convince Americans that Islam has always been part of America's history, to misrepresent that history. For the dinner Jefferson gave was not intended to be an Iftar dinner, and his guest that evening was not "the first Muslim ambassador... from Tunisia," but in using such words, Obama was engaged in a little *nunc pro tunc* backdating, so that the Iftar dinner that he gave in 2010 could be presented as part of a supposed tradition of such presidential Iftar dinners, going all the way back to the time of Jefferson.

But before explaining what that "first Iftar dinner" really was, let's go back to an earlier but even more egregious example of Obama's rewriting: the speech he delivered in Cairo on June 4, 2009. In that speech, he described Islam and America sharing basic principles:

*I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles – principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.*

And then for his Muslim guests he segued into a flattering lesson in History. First he described Western Civ., which, he said, owed so much of its development to Islam:

*As a student of history, I also know civilization's debt to Islam. It was Islam – at places like Al-Azhar – that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment. It was innovation in Muslim communities – (applause) – it was innovation in Muslim communities that developed the order of algebra; our magnetic compass and tools of navigation; our mastery of pens and printing; our understanding of how disease spreads and how it can be healed. Islamic culture has given us majestic arches and soaring spires; timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality. (Applause.)*

And Islam played – according to Obama – a significant role in American history, too:

*I also know that Islam has always been a part of America's story. The first nation to recognize my country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second President, John Adams, wrote, "The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Muslims." And since our founding, American Muslims have enriched the United States. They have fought in our wars, they have served in our government, they have stood for civil rights, they have started businesses, they have taught at our universities, they've excelled in our sports arenas, they've won Nobel Prizes, built our tallest building, and lit the Olympic Torch. And when the first Muslim American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Koran that one of our Founding*

*Fathers – Thomas Jefferson – kept in his personal library. (Applause.)*

We could go through those paragraphs accompanied by such keen students of history as Gibbon, John Quincy Adams, Jacob Burckhardt, and Winston Churchill, all of whom had occasion to study and comment upon Islam, their remarks rebutting proleptically Obama's vaporings with their much more informed and sober take on the faith – but that is for another occasion. We can note, however, that when Obama in his Cairo speech talks about "the light of learning" being held aloft at places like Al-Azhar, he misstates: some Greek texts were translated into Arabic and thereby "kept alive" instead of being lost to history, but the translators were mostly Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews, not Muslims, and the work of translation went on not at Al-Azhar but at the courts of Cordoba and Baghdad. The word "algebra" is certainly Arab, but algebra itself was a product of Sanskrit mathematicians. The printing press was not a Muslim invention, and its use was accepted in the Muslim East only long after it had been in use in Western Christendom. Indeed, in Islam itself the very notion of innovation, or *bida*, is frowned upon, and not only, as some Muslim apologists have claimed, in theological matters. And so on.

*I also know that Islam has always been a part of America's story. The first nation to recognize my country was Morocco.*

The picture Obama paints by implication, of Muslims being deeply involved in the grand sweep of American history practically from the time of the Framers (at least he didn't make the mistake of the State Department flunky who claimed Muslims accompanied Columbus on his voyages) is simply false. The first mosque in North America was a one-room affair in 1929; the second mosque was not built until 1934. The first Muslim to be elected to Congress was Keith Ellison, less than a decade ago. The Muslim appearance in America is very late. As for Morocco being the first country to recognize the United States in a treaty, Morocco also soon violated that very treaty and became the first country to go to war with the young Republic. That is something Obama's advisers may not have told him.

When Obama quotes that single phrase from John Adams, made at the signing of the Treaty of Tripoli, a treaty designed to free American ships and seaman from the ever-present threat from the marauding Muslim corsairs in the Mediterranean that attacked Christian shipping at will (and when America became independent, it



could no longer count on the Royal Navy to protect its ships), he wants us to think that our second president was approving of Islam. But that is to misinterpret his statement, clearly meant to be taken to have this meaning: *we in the United States, have a priori nothing against Islam*. Rhetoric designed to diplomatically please. But based on his subsequent experiences with the North African Muslims, including his experiences with them after various treaties were made and then broken, Adams came to a different and negative view of Islam, a view that was shared by all those Americans who, whether diplomats or seized seamen, had any direct dealings with Muslims. America's first encounter with Muslims was that with the Barbary Pirates, from Morocco to Algiers to Tunis to Tripoli, and their behavior rendered Adams's initial "the United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Muslims" null and void. And it was not John Adams himself, but his son John Quincy Adams (our most learned President), who studied Islam in depth, and it was he to whom Obama ought to have turned to find out more about Islam. For he would have found, among other piercing and accurate remarks by J. Q. Adams, the following:

*The precept of the Koran is, perpetual war against all who deny, that Mahomet is the prophet of God. The vanquished may purchase their lives, by the payment of tribute; the victorious may be appeased by a false and delusive promise of peace; and the faithful follower of the prophet, may submit to the imperious necessities of defeat: but the command to propagate the Moslem creed by the sword is always obligatory, when it can be made effective. The commands of the prophet may be performed alike, by fraud, or by force.*

Isn't it amazing that not a single American official – and not just Obama – has ever alluded to the study of Islam that one of our most illustrious presidents produced?

Again, Obama, with a jumble of Jefferson, Ellison, and Holy Koran:

*And when the first Muslim American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Koran that one of our Founding Fathers – Thomas Jefferson – kept in his personal library.*

When Obama notes that Thomas Jefferson had a copy of the Qur'an in his

“personal” library, he is subtly implying that Jefferson approved of its contents. Keith Ellison did much the same when he ostentatiously used that very copy of the Qur’an for his own swearing-in as the first Muslim Congressman. But Jefferson, a curious and cultivated man, with a large library, had a copy of the Qur’an for the same reason you or I might possess a copy, that is, simply to find out what was in it. And we might note in passing that it was not the “Holy Koran” that Jefferson possessed and Ellison borrowed, but an English translation by George Sale of the “Koran.” According to Muslims, the epithet “Holy” can only be attached to a Koran written and read in the original Arabic. White House, for the next time, take note.

There is not a single American statesman or traveler or diplomat in the days of the early Republic who had a good word for Islam once he had studied it, or had had dealings with Muslims or had travelled to their countries. Look high, look low, consult whatever records you want in the National Archives or the Library of Congress, and you will not find any such testimony. And the very idea that an American President would someday praise Islam to the skies in Obama’s fulsome manner would have astounded them all.

*And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance.*

*Also sprach Obama.* But Islam is based on an uncompromising division of humanity into Muslims and Non-Muslims, Believers and Unbelievers, and Unbelievers, at best, can be allowed to live in a Muslim polity – be “tolerated” – only if they accept a position of permanent and humiliating inferiority. It would be fascinating if Obama could name even one example of Islam demonstrating through words and deeds “the possibilities of religious tolerance.”

But let’s return to Obama’s assertion about Jefferson’s “Iftar Dinner,” or rather, to that dinner that Barack Obama would have us all believe was the first “Iftar Dinner” at the White House, way back in 1805.

Here is the background to that meal in 1805 which not Jefferson, but Obama, calls an “Iftar Dinner”:

*In the Mediterranean, American ships, now deprived of the protection formerly offered by the Royal Navy, suffered constant depredations by Muslim corsairs,*

*who were not so much pirates acting alone but were officially encouraged to prey on Christian shipping, and at times even recorded the areas of the Mediterranean where they planned to go in search of Christian prey. Under Jefferson, America took a more aggressive line:*

*Soon after the Revolutionary War and the consequent loss of the British navy's protection, American merchant vessels had become prey for Barbary corsairs. Jefferson was outraged by the demands of ransom for civilians captured from American vessels and the Barbary states' expectation of annual tribute.*

*The crisis with Tunis erupted when the USS Constitution captured Tunisian vessels attempting to run the American blockade of Tripoli. The bey of Tunis threatened war and sent Mellimelli [Sidi Soliman Mellimelli] to the United States to negotiate full restitution for the captured vessels and to barter for tribute.*

Mellimelli was not, *pace* Obama, “the first Muslim ambassador to the United States” – there was no official exchange of ambassadors – but a temporary envoy with a single limited task: to get an agreement that would set free the Tunisian vessels and come to an agreement about future payment – if any – of tribute by, or to Tripoli. At the end of six months, that envoy was to return home.

The Muslim envoy made some unexpected personal demands in Washington:

*Jefferson balked at paying tribute but accepted the expectation that the host government would cover all expenses for such an emissary. He arranged for Mellimelli and his 11 attendants to be housed at a Washington hotel, and rationalized that the sale of the four horses and other fine gifts sent by the bey of Tunis would cover costs. Mellimelli's request for “concubines” as a part of his accommodations was left to Secretary of State James Madison. Jefferson assured one senator that obtaining peace with the Barbary powers was important enough to “pass unnoticed the irregular conduct of their ministers.*

Some readers will no doubt be reminded by this request for “concubines” of how the State Department has supplied female companions to much more recent Arab visitors, including the late King Hussein of Jordan.

Mellimelli proved to be the exotic cynosure of all eyes, with his American hosts

not really understanding some of his reactions, as his “surprise” at the “social freedom women enjoyed in America” and his belief that only Moses, Jesus Christ, and Mohammed were acceptable “prophets” to follow, for they lacked the understanding of Islam that would have explained such reactions:

*Despite whispers regarding his conduct, Mellimelli received invitations to numerous dinners and balls, and according to one Washington hostess was “the lion of the season.” At the president’s New Year’s Day levee the Tunisian envoy provided “its most brilliant and splendid spectacle,” and added to his melodramatic image at a later dinner party hosted by the secretary of state. Upon learning that the Madisons were unhappy at being childless, Mellimelli flung his “magical” cloak around Dolley Madison and murmured an incantation that promised she would bear a male child. His conjuring, however, did not work.*

*Differences in culture and customs stirred interest on both sides. Mellimelli’s generous use of scented rose oil was noted by many of those who met him, and guards had to be posted outside his lodgings to turn away the curious. For his part, the Tunisian was surprised at the social freedom women enjoyed in America and was especially intrigued by several delegations of Native Americans from the western territories then visiting Washington. Mellimelli inquired which prophet the Indians followed: Moses, Jesus Christ or Mohammed. When he was told none of them, that they worshiped “the Great Spirit” alone, he was reported to have pronounced them “vile hereticks.”*

So that’s it. Sidi Soliman Mellimelli installed himself for six months at a Washington hotel, for which the American government apparently picked up the tab including, very likely, that for the requested “concubines.” He cut a dashing figure:

*The curious were not to be disappointed by the appearance of the first Muslim envoy to the United States – a large figure with a full dark beard dressed in robes of richly embroidered fabrics and a turban of fine white muslin.*

*Over the next six months, this exotic representative from a distant and unfamiliar culture would add spice to the Washington social season but also test the diplomatic abilities of President Jefferson.*

During the time Mellimelli was here, Ramadan occurred. And as it happens, during that Ramadan observed by Mellimelli, President Jefferson invited Sidi Soliman Mellimelli for dinner at the White House. The dinner was not meant to be an "Iftar dinner" but just a dinner, albeit at the White House; it was originally set for three thirty in the afternoon (our founding fathers dined early in the pre-Edison days of their existence). Mellimelli said he could not come at that appointed hour of three thirty p.m., but only after sundown.

Jefferson, a courteous man, simply moved the dinner forward by a few hours. He didn't change the menu, he didn't change anything else, he did not see himself as offering an "Iftar Dinner," and there are no records to hint that he did. Barack Obama, 200 years later, is trying to rewrite American history, with some *nunc-pro-tunc* backdating, in order to flatter or please his Muslim guests. But he is misrepresenting American history to Americans, including schoolchildren who are now being subject to all kinds of Islamic propaganda, in newly-mandated textbooks, that so favorably depict Islam, and present it as so integral a part of American life.

Now there is a kind of coda to this dismal tale, and it is provided by the *New York Times*, which likes to put on airs and think of itself as "the newspaper of record," whatever that means. The Times carried a front-page story on August 14, 2010, written by one Sheryl Gay Stolberg, and no doubt gone over by many vigilant editors. This story contains a predictably glowing account of Barack Obama's remarks a few days before at the "Annual Iftar Dinner." Here is the paragraph that caught my eye:

*In hosting the iftar, Mr. Obama was following a White House tradition that, while sporadic, dates to Thomas Jefferson, who held a sunset dinner for the first Muslim ambassador to the United States. President George W. Bush hosted iftars annually.*

Question for Sheryl Gay Stolberg, and for her editors at The New York Times: You report that there is a "White House tradition that, while sporadic, dates to Thomas Jefferson." I claim that you are wrong. I claim that there is no White House Tradition of Iftar Dinners. I claim that Thomas Jefferson, in moving forward by a few hours a dinner that changed in no other respect, for Sidi Soliman Mellimelli, did not think he was providing what he thought of as an

"Iftar Dinner," but simply a dinner, at a time his guest requested. And to describe as a "White House tradition" and the first of the "Annual Iftar Dinners" that, the New York Times tells us, has since Jefferson's non-existent "Iftar Dinner," have been observed "sporadically," has absolutely no basis in fact.

When, then, was the next in this long, but "sporadic" series of Iftar dinners? I can find no record of any, for roughly the next two hundred years, until we come to the fall of the year 2001, that is, just after the deadliest attack on American civilians ever recorded, an attack carried out by a novemdecet of Muslims acting according to their orthodox understanding of the very same texts – Qur'an, Hadith, Sira – that all Muslims rely on for authority. It was President George W. Bush who decided that, to win Muslim "trust" or to end Muslim "mistrust" – I forget which – so that we could, non-Muslim and Muslim, collaborate on defeating those "violent extremists" who had "hijacked a great religion," started this sporadic ball unsporadically rolling. And he did what he set out to do, by golly, he did. He hosted an Iftar Dinner just a month after the attacks on the World Trade Center, on the Pentagon, on a plane's doomed pilots and passengers over a field in Pennsylvania.

And thus it is that, ever since 2001, we have had Iftar dinner after Iftar dinner. But it was not Jefferson or any other of our learned Presidents who started this "tradition" that has been observed only "sporadically" – unless we were to count as an "Iftar dinner" what was merely seen, by Jefferson, as a dinner given at a time convenient for his exotic guest.

George W. Bush, that profound student of history and of ideas, kept telling us, in those first few months after 9/11/2001, that as far as he was concerned, by gum, Islam was a religion of "peace and tolerance." He and Obama agree on that. And just to prove it, by golly, he'd put on an Iftar Dinner with all the fixins. And that's just what he did. And that's how the long "tradition" that Sheryl Gay Stolberg, and her many vetting editors at the newspaper of comical record, *The New York Times*, referred to, began. It's all of fourteen years old now, having survived and thrived through the differently-disastrous presidencies of Bush and of Obama.

**Craig Considine on Religious Pluralism and Civic Rights in a "Muslim Nation": An Analysis of Prophet Muhammad's Covenants with Christians**

According to [Considine promises readers](#) of this “covenants with Christians” paper that he will “share...what I have learned about Muhammad and how his legacy informs my understanding of Islam. Muhammad’s beliefs on how to treat religious minorities make him a universal champion of human rights, particularly as it pertains to freedom of conscience, freedom of worship, and the right for[sic] minorities to have protection during times of strife.” In other words, we are about to discover a Muhammad-we-hardly-knew-ye kind of Muhammad, an interfaith-healing Muhammad, whose fondest desire is to protect freedom of religion and to be a “champion of human rights.”

And then begins his magical-mystery-tour through early Islam. Considine starts by assuming the historical truth of a document which Muhammad purportedly made with the Christian monks at Mount Sinai:

*Muhammad initiated many legal covenants with Christians and Jews after establishing his Muslim community. For example, in one covenant with the Christian monks at Mount Sinai, Egypt, Muhammad called on Muslims to respect Christian judges and churches, and for no Muslim to fight against his Christian brother or sister. Through this agreement, Muhammad made it clear that Islam, as a political and philosophical way of life, respected and protected Christians.*

All very fine, were there sufficient evidence to support any of it, but as Robert Spencer showed in a devastating review, this “covenant” must surely be a forgery, very likely made by the monks themselves, in order to ensure their good treatment by Muslims on the invoked authority of Muhammad.

[a review of Morrow’s book](#):

*these documents [the covenants] represent not the aspirations of the Prophet Muhammad, but of those religious minorities who fell under the rule of his successors.*

And, continues Hunt, “what are the chances that any Muslim, including those who endorse this book [or Considine’s paper], will give these documents, completely unattested by proper isnad, the status of even the weakest hadith? None. So they will remain to the Muslim community historical curiosities with no religious

authority whatsoever.”

At his website, Craig Considine tells the world about himself: “My passions include thinking, teaching, writing, speaking, traveling, and fostering peace.” Perhaps his thinking has been a bit too wishful, and that peace he fondly fosters too much a peace that passeth understanding.

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