

Texas shooting: Bigotry doesn't justify violence

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Marc J. Randazza

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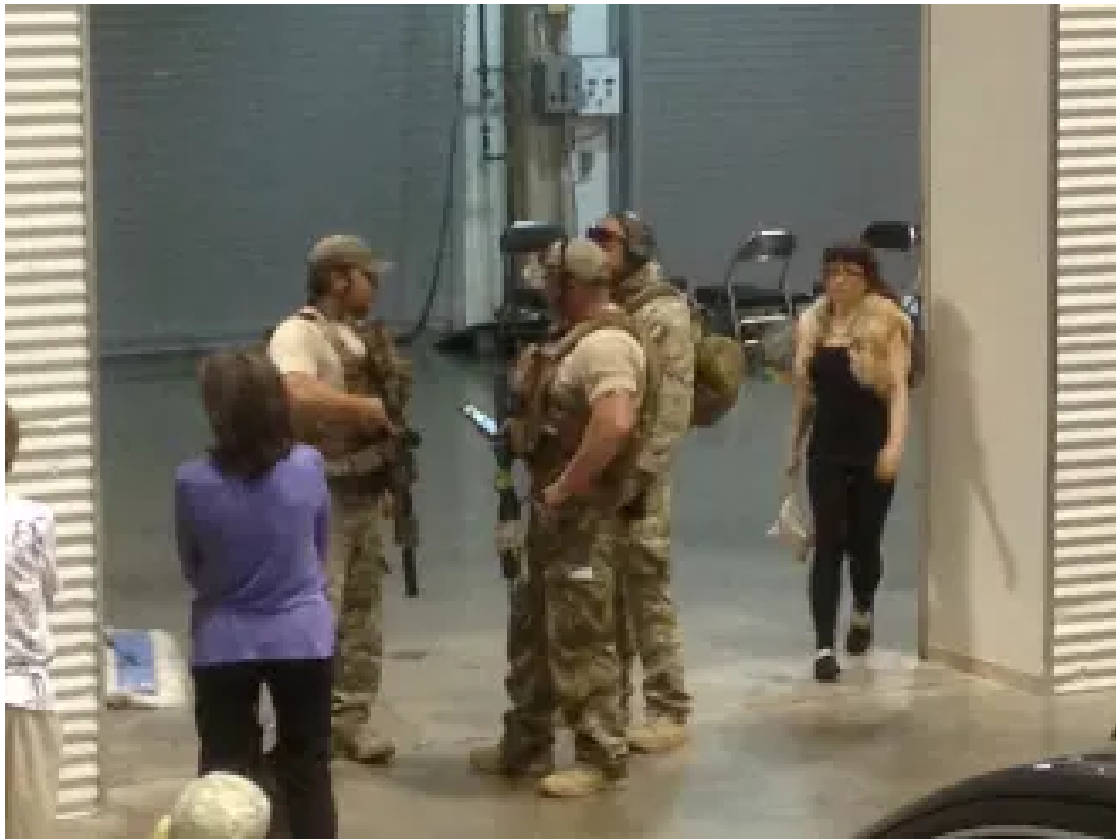


A member of the Garland Police Department keeps members of the audience inside the Curtis Culwell Center in Garland, Texas, after reports of shots fired outside. Two men were shot outside the event, called the Muhammad Art Exhibit and Cartoon Contest. The exhibit

was sponsored by the American Freedom Defense Initiative.

LARRY W. SMITH /LANDOV







Two shot and killed at 'Muhammad Art, Cartoon Contest' in Texas

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Editor's Note: Marc J. Randazza is a Las Vegas-based First Amendment attorney and managing partner of the Randazza Legal Group. He is licensed to practice in Arizona, California, Florida, Massachusetts and Nevada. His paper "Freedom of Expression and Morality-Based Impediments to the Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights" will be published in the next edition of the Nevada Law Journal. The opinions expressed in this commentary are his.

CNN —

Famed Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market."

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Some criticize that theory. I can live with that. Let us discuss, debate, and let that debate get uncivil at times. The one common ground that I can count on with those who disagree is that neither of us will draw weapons to prove our point.

That is what civilization is.

Yet Monday we clean the blood off the ground in Garland, Texas, because two men tried to kill people for drawing pictures of Mohammed. The “Draw Mohammed” event was apparently put on Sunday for the purpose of provocation. The group that put it on is not made up of the best people. Stop Islamization of America, also known as American Freedom Defense Initiative, is an offshoot of a European xenophobic organization, and is led by a complete ignoramus.



Video Ad Feedback

Gunmen opened fire at Mohammed cartoon event

02:07 - Source: [CNN](#)

And its intent was to show disrespect – even bigotry. So what? In our society, we defend the right of those who disagree with us to do so as we attempt to put our ideas ahead of theirs in that all important marketplace.

Question, debate and even mockery are all fair weapons. We are able to debate, even by throwing a verbal elbow here and there. Nobody ever said that the marketplace of ideas had to be a padded room where you spar with cotton candy.

While I am a voice for acceptance of our Middle Eastern brothers and sisters, I reject any notion of Islam as a sacred cow. If people, including Muslims, wish to be part of a civilized society, they must accept the fact that civilized societies have a right to reject their beliefs, to debate them, and to mock them.

This is hard to deal with sometimes. It requires us to accept the right of loathsome ideas to exist, but (again Holmes), “we should be eternally vigilant against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe.”

For the third time this year, we have a deadly attack “provoked” by people who were not “sufficiently respectful” to Islam.

Cartoons led to the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris. The same ilk then killed atheist blogger Avijit Roy in Bangladesh for questioning the “religion of peace.” And now Garland.

And how counterproductive it all has been.

[video](#)

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We do not yet know the exact motivations of the men who opened fire on the event – they were killed by police. But is there any worse way to demand respect for your beliefs than to insist that those who criticize it must pay with their lives? Other religions have had to tolerate humor, too. And there is room in every religion for humor. Judaism built American comedy in large part by poking fun at itself. Did anybody ever want to shoot Mel Brooks?



When the play “The Book of Mormon” was staged in Los Angeles, the Church of Latter-day Saints bought an ad in the playbill. To me, that makes their adherents seem confident in their beliefs – worthy of respect, because they can roll with a few laughs at their expense.

Moderate Muslims should take note that to the extent they seek acceptance, their greatest enemies are those who engage in violence in their quest for respect.

I have no quarrel with Islam (no more than any other religion). But with attacks such as the one we saw in Garland, it is being represented as one of the weakest philosophies on earth. No views are so sacred that they need not be challenged, and the challenged do not get to decide how the challenge comes at them. If it is insulting cartoons, or simply questioning the existence or wisdom of their prophet, living in an enlightened and free society means we tolerate that.

Of course, we do have an idea floating around that I find loathsome – those who blame the victims. Those who ask, “Why be provocative?” My answer, “because we can,” and not only that “to ensure that we can keep doing so.”

Because the day that we say that there is one idea that we cannot mock, that is the day that we lose much more than a life, and much more than a debate.

That is when we lose freedom itself.

So draw. Mock. Point and laugh. If you do it to me, I will not draw a gun. Because my beliefs are strong enough that they can withstand the power of a cartoon. Are yours?

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