

Should Lowes have pulled its ads?

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In Theory: Should Lowes have pulled its ads?

Question:

Home improvement store Lowe's has pulled its advertising from the TLC reality show "All-American Muslim" because of a campaign by the conservative Florida Family Assn. The FFA claims that "All-American Muslim" is propaganda that riskily hides the Islamic agenda's clear and present danger to American liberties and traditional values." Residents in Dearborn, Mich., where the show is filmed, called the move "a slap in the face of our rich American diversity."

In an email to the FFA, Lowe's said, "[T]here are certain programs that do not meet Lowe's advertising guidelines, including the show you brought to our attention. Lowe's will no longer be advertising on that [All American Muslim] program."

The show, launched in November, follows the lives of a group of Muslims in Dearborn, which is home to the largest number of Muslims in America, and has been praised for providing an insight into the lives of American Muslims. A review in the Los Angeles Times said, "[T]he general impression is one of a lot of nice people — most of them Dearborn born-and-bred, solid Midwesterners with Middle Eastern roots — trying to lead happy lives."

The backlash against Lowe's has been quick and vociferous, with thousands of comments on its Facebook page and hundreds of blog posts attacking its move. The hacker group Anonymous even brought down the FFA's website on Dec. 13, just hours after the announcement.

On the other hand, many support the FFA and Lowe's stance. The blog www.barenakedislam.com, which labeled "All-American Muslim" a "shameful propaganda program," said in a post, "BNI and its readers send heartfelt thanks to the Florida Family Association for their help in educating TLC advertisers about the fraud being perpetrated by that show re: Islamic community in this country."

Has Lowe's acted correctly in pulling its advertising from the show?

Answer:

We are being asked once again to weigh in on an act of bigotry against Muslims. Does Lowe's have a right to withdraw its advertising dollars from a television show that it finds not in keeping with its values? Certainly it does. But when those values support a point of view that is quite frankly biased against a particular religious group and accuses that group of some sort of conspiracy in a program whose only crime is that it features the everyday lives of American Muslims, I find that reprehensible.

The purpose of the program "All-American Muslim" seems to be an effort to break down the stereotypes and barriers that separate people of different faith traditions by presenting real Muslim people in the show as the average Americans they are. And Lowe's has succumbed to the paranoia foisted off on other Americans by such groups as the Florida Family Association, encouraging people to believe that simply being a Muslim impugns your character and integrity.

My hope is that people of faith will see through this travesty and let Lowe's hear from them. We cannot allow ourselves to be influenced by hatred and fear when it is unfounded. And we need to move beyond prejudice and reach out to those of all religious faiths, or none, to make the world a more loving and safe place for all. In that way, we can truly live the values we profess and become our best selves.

The Rev. Dr. Betty Stapleford
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Verdugo Hills
La Crescenta

When I first heard that Lowe's had pulled its ad, I was furious — but then I realized that other businesses had pulled their ads, too. So the problem isn't only with Lowe's. Also, shouldn't businesses be able to make free choices about with whom they advertise? Of course they should.

The deeper and more insidious issue (other than lily-livered advertisers being bullied by the FFA — what's that stand for, anyway, "Fervent Fanatics of America"?) is the refusal of some folks in America to realize that not all Muslims are fanatics. I just hope that Muslims and Jews realize that not all Christians are fanatics.

The Dearborn, Mich., Muslim community has been there since long before 9/11. Believe it or not, some Muslims came to America to escape the oppression of their native countries, and for the same reasons some of our forefathers came: to worship in peace, to have a safe place to live and to raise a family. So to tar all Muslims with the same brush is criminal, and about as unChristian and unAmerican as you can get.

I wasn't alive when Pearl Harbor happened, but I'm ashamed of what my country did then. The good ol' Land of the Free, Home of the Brave rounded up anybody with a Japanese name (at least on the West Coast), took away their businesses, and shipped them off to concentration camps. We had a reason: They looked like the enemy. And we were afraid.

Fear does crazy things to some people. Remember the old Twilight Zone episode called, "Monsters on Main Street"? It showed what fear can do to a civilized people. So I'm ashamed of Lowe's and other advertisers who knuckled under to bigotry. But I'll save my deeper disgust for the Freaking Fanatics of America. It's Christmas, FFA, so don't forget to go to church. Blecchh!

The Rev. Skip Lindeman
La Cañada Congregational Church
La Cañada Flintridge

By pulling its advertising from a show that has no agenda other than simply following the daily lives of a group of American Muslims, Lowe's has demonstrated a clear lack of business and ethical principles.

Lowe's unfortunate action makes it obvious that its organizational environment is not grounded in basic ethical values of diversity that is commonplace in corporate America — the authentic diversity that makes both business sense and advances our nation to be truly exceptional among nations as engraved on the Statue of Liberty in New York: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

No other country on earth values and thrives on diversity like the U.S. But instead of celebrating that diversity, Lowe's has chosen to pander to an extremist organization such as the Florida Family Association, a narrow-minded special-interest group that seeks to trash our shared values of religious freedom and equal treatment of all faiths. By making the absurd claim that the show hides "the Islamic agenda's clear and present danger to American liberties and traditional values," FFA — and, in turn, Lowe's, by succumbing to FFA's demands — demonstrates its complete ignorance of Islam and American Muslims, promoting Islamophobia and spreading hate and bigotry instead of the shared religious values of neighborly love and mutual understanding.

Lowe's corporate culture needs a fundamental shift, either through replacing its management team or retraining that team's members, so that it would begin to value the time-honored American tradition of diversity and embody the corporate standards of most American companies.

Levant Akbarut
Islamic Congregation of La Cañada Flintridge
La Cañada Flintridge

I hesitate answering these types of questions because I find that so many people don't really want to discuss any issues that might be contrary to their personal notions of right and wrong or their immediate perceptions. How fast did the name-calling, the destruction of websites, and everything else against Lowe's occur as soon as the story broke?

If Lowe's perceived that the show was not especially truthful, then why shouldn't they find less controversial places to advertise? Not choosing to spend their money there shouldn't immediately be construed as hateful. Do you think company execs sat around plotting to insult Muslims? They hire Muslims. And what of the fact that Lowe's was initially advertising with the Muslim show? It's when problems were suggested that the company chose not to perpetuate said problems for any possibility of them being true. Kind of like when you vote for someone and only afterward find out they were a tad more controversial than you were aware. You might want to distance yourself from that before it's an issue, and I think that's what Lowe's did. Cut 'em a break, they are one of the most charitable companies out there.

Now, I am a Christian, and I do see Islam as an enemy of my faith, American or otherwise. I don't view individual Muslims as my enemies, but the belief system they hold most certainly is. For example, this is Christmas. It's an American federal holiday. Christmas is about the birth of Christ, the incarnate God, the Messiah and savior of mankind. God is a triune being, and Jesus is designated "son" within that trinity.

Muslims deny all this. They say God cannot have a son, Jesus is not the God-man, and they deny even his purpose in being born, the cross. American Muslims exalt Muhammad above Jesus, and pray toward Arabia five times a day. I dunno, I might have a few questions about the show too, but of course, the politically correct people have destroyed the websites where we might learn if there is any truth to Lowe's concerns. So much for our all-American freedom of speech.

The Rev. Bryan Griem
Montrose Community Church
Montrose

I feel that Lowe's was misguided when it pulled its advertising from "All-American Muslim." I believe that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the United States strive to be good Americans and wish to fully participate in our democratic society. Unlike the nations of Western Europe, where the trend runs toward segmentation and factionalism,

our country is a place where immigrants of all religions and races can fully integrate and achieve the American dream.

Positive, reality-based shows like “All-American Muslim” provide the rest of us with a glimpse into America's Islamic communities and help us understand that they are composed of normal, hard-working people just like the rest of us, people who want to achieve happiness and success for themselves and their children. Most of these individuals truly appreciate the freedoms and opportunities they are afforded in this country — especially since their families have emigrated from repressive regimes where liberty is unheard of, individual rights are non-existent, and there are no rights for women and minorities.

By breaking through negative stereotypes and assumptions, a TV show like “All-American Muslim” can provide illuminating insights to the general public. Potential commercial sponsors shouldn't bow to pressure groups seeking to undermine the program. At the same time, however, we would be naïve to deny that there are elements of radical Islam that are trying to infiltrate America's Muslim communities. This is evident from the recent news articles regarding terrorist training on American soil, and federal raids on businesses acting as fronts for financial funding of terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah. These incidents are serious reason for concern and should galvanize the American Muslim communities to redouble their efforts to shun these hateful groups and report them whenever they materialize.

Rabbi Simcha Backman
Chabad Jewish Center
Glendale

Lowe's certainly does not seem to have helped its business by siding with the Florida Family Association, and neither organization has acted intelligently. Apparently a previous FFA campaign proved to be the best recruiting effort ever for building a school's gay-straight alliance, which the FFA opposed, and this is surely another strategic blunder on the FFA's part.

In my opinion, consumers are correct to hold content-providers and advertisers accountable for the quality of TV programming. (Whether any reality TV meets an acceptable standard for good entertainment is another question — I personally don't see their appeal.) Voting with one's wallet against prejudice and ignorance is commendable, but unfortunately, in this case, the FFA is totally out to lunch once again in its assessment of “All-American Muslim.”

In another bad decision contrary to American values, a few local businesses voted to remove the American flag in Montrose because of the peaceful, legal presence there

every Friday night of the Montrose Peace Vigil. Those businesses still get no money from me, but I live in hope that the shopping park association will wise up someday.

Absent this sort of moral consideration, my advice to consumers is to shop locally and support our independent stores whenever possible, be they worshipers of Allah, Aphrodite, God, Lord Hanuman or of no diety at all.

Roberta Medford

Atheist

Montrose

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were the legalistic law-makers of their culture. If anyone didn't follow their self-made, frequently God-denying rules, he was kicked out of the synagogue and marginalized from society. Today's true Pharisees are the legalistic keepers of "tolerance." Having taken the mantle of morality and justice upon themselves, they make their own rules, often in defiance of Scripture. If you don't keep their rules, they'll try to punish you through legal, social and financial pressure. This enforcement of political correctness has gone far beyond standing for the rights of the oppressed. It has become oppression of anything that does not conform to its man-centered ideology.

Lowe's acted correctly in pulling its advertising from "All-American Muslim." It's Lowe's money to spend, and the company is absolutely free to do so in accordance with its own corporate conscience and its own corporate goals. Maybe Lowe's critics should learn tolerance for people and organizations who don't cower before the secularist-demanded amalgamization and dumbing-down of religious expression in our country into a distinctive-denying "one-size-fits-all" and ultimately meaningless theology.

Many people think that following God means adding a list of burdensome rules to one's life, but please take note that the exact opposite is true. The more man makes himself the judge of morality, the more he enslaves himself in petty rules that actually hinder freedom. The angels told the shepherds, "Today in the city of David there has been born for you a savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). And those whom the Son of God sets free are free indeed from the oppression and coercion of men.

Pastor Jon Barta

Valley Baptist Church

Burbank

Once when Jesus was preaching to large crowds of people, someone shouted a question to him: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus turned to the questioner and replied, “What is written in the law? ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ Do this, and you will live.” And he started to turn away, and looked back down at his notes to resume his speech.

But the same person shouted back, “And who is my neighbor?”

So Jesus said, “A man was going down from Detroit to Toledo and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance the head of the Florida Family Association was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise the CEO of Lowe’s Home Improvement stores, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

“But a Muslim from Dearborn came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having put Neosporin on them. Then he put him in his own car, brought him to a hotel and took care of him. The next day he took a hundred dollars out of his wallet, gave it to the bell boy, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’”

Then Jesus asked those who were listening: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” Someone said, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”
(A paraphrase of Luke 10:25-37)

The Rev. Amy Pringle
St. George’s Episcopal Church
La Cañada Flintridge

There are a lot of things about this situation that are crazy. Why does Lowe’s assume that it will sell more DIY supplies to more people with a knee-jerk response to an organization that may just be one guy making anti-Muslim noise? I would have thought that 3 million moderate Muslims and their allies in the struggle against prejudice and stereotyping would be a good source of potential business. And why would Kayak, which claims it’s not part of all this anti-Muslim turmoil, not then wait a few weeks to declare the show too mediocre for their advertising dollars? And why would the one guy or small group of Florida Family Association members be so upset about a show that cultivates tolerance by assuming the best in people? Why critique a show for failing to cultivate hate by assuming the worst? I just don’t get it.

While I can’t be the first person to say this, I’m going to say it anyway: Hey, Lowe’s —

let's build something together. Let's build a world in which fear never wins the day. Let's build a world in which prejudice is a distant memory. Let's build a world in which hope conquers despair, and peacemaking is a skill that we honor.

I don't know how the Muslim folks of Dearborn feel about all of this discussion. They might be OK with it. After all, they put themselves and their lives on display, not to entertain so much as to represent. For people who don't have moderate Muslim friends, this is a peek into the homes of some American neighbors, a way to get to know some virtual friends.

The Florida Family Association has managed to make this a national conversation. Lots of people are watching TLC and All-American Muslim who weren't watching it before. Keep representing. We know you're next door living normal lives and trying to build a world in which extreme views — of any sort — do not define a people.

The Rev. Paige Eaves
Crescenta Valley United Methodist Church
Montrose

Yes, religious bigotry is alive and well in this country, and that bigotry is not limited to targeting Muslims.

I have not seen the show "All American Muslim", so I can't comment on the show itself, but I can comment on the reactions to it.

The Florida Family Association has the right to campaign against the show and its advertisers. Lowe's has the right to decide whether or not to advertise on the show. The Learning Channel has the right to broadcast the show. Muslims have the right to condemn the Florida Family Foundation and Lowe's. All of those rights are afforded under the U.S. Constitution. Even so, those rights are not absolute — one does not have the right to yell "fire" in a crowded theater with impunity.

To me, associated with those rights is the implicit responsibility to exercise them in a responsible manner. I readily acknowledge that the law does not require such a standard, but I believe it should exist. Moreover, when such rights are being exercised by religious individuals, I believe the standard should be even higher.

Before writing, I viewed a short video news clip from an interview with the head of the Florida Family Association. In it, he said that the problem with the show lies in the fact that it does not show the radical side of Islam. Consistent with this, the Florida Family Association's website states, "The show profiles only Muslims that appear to be ordinary folks while excluding many Islamic believers whose agenda poses a clear and present

danger to liberties and traditional values that the majority of Americans cherish.”

What I generally see in the news and on television are stories about the radical aspects of Islam. I do not often see news or stories about American Muslims and their everyday life in America. Maybe I watched too many seasons of “24”.

Is the Florida Family Association exercising its rights in a responsible manner? I’m not convinced that it is.

Rick Callister
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
La Cañada Flintridge

This holiday season is a good time to remember some things we celebrate about America. One of the foundation stones that make up this nation is the separation of church and state. This is an incredibly valuable part of our democracy, especially at times of the year that are considered religious holidays. All Americans have the same rights, including those of us who are not members of the Christian faith.

Lowe's stores pulled their advertising from the show “All American Muslim” several weeks ago. I support a commercial company that refuses to advertise on a program that features religious references. I hope Lowe's is being honest when it claims to “have a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.” I would not be so supportive if I believed Lowe's is only rejecting this show because it showcases a national minority. There are many individuals and groups in America that are not accepted with equality and justice in the public sphere. I hope that companies and advertisers will not discriminate against any groups that have less power and influence.

Christianity is the most favored religion in this country and exerts influence over almost every aspect of our public life. I am glad that separation of church and state is enshrined in our government so that each American feels free to make his/her own choices. Lowe's is perfectly justified choosing which television programs will receive the company’s advertising dollars.

Steven Gibson
South Pasadena Atheist Meetup
Altadena

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