

**Program Title:** Inciting Violence in a Democratic Society

**Category:** Israel Education

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**Created for:** Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day

*Please Note: This program may be used "as-is," however; NFTYites are encouraged to "adapt" programs, combining their own elements of innovation with this preexisting program.*

### **TOUCHSTONE TEXT:**

"Violence erodes the basis of Israeli democracy. It must be condemned and isolated. This is not the way of the State of Israel. In a democracy there can be differences, but the final decision will be taken in democratic elections..." -- Prime Minister Rabin last remarks at Tel Aviv peace rally (November 4, 1995)

### **GOALS:**

- The participants will familiarize themselves with Rabin's character as a military general and peace activist and with the peace process timeline in Israel.
- The participants will learn about the process of inciting violence before Rabin's assassination and the consequences it brought; using this as a case study to encourage awareness of the dangers of inciting violence within our daily lives and to become attuned to the impact it has on our society.
- The participants explore topics of hate speech and how it influences all people both using and targeted by it, including incidences of hate speech in contemporary American society.

### **DETAILED PROCEDURE:**

#### **Part A- Interactive timeline of Rabin's life**

Divide the participants into four groups. Each group is assigned a category (Childhood, Military Life, Political Life and Peace Process, and Assassination) and given two pieces of paper with of text: a summary of that period of Rabin's life, and an excerpt from a speech that Rabin gave referring to the same subject (Appendix 1).

The groups have 15-20 minutes to read both and then to make a silent skit or human tableau (still-life) to go along with either all or part of the speech that they like. After that everybody is brought back together and the groups perform the skit while one or more of the group members read all or part of the speech excerpt that they like aloud.

#### **Part B- The incitement against Rabin**

The program leader gives time for the participants to read parts from the article "Murder in the Name of God" (Appendix 2). The article describes how religious extremism in Israel led to the murder of Yitzhak Rabin, and has interesting sections on the indifference of government and society, the "polite" incitement in the press, and even in American society.

In addition or instead, if the technological means allows, you may show the following videos regarding the assassination:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlcT5TlovAs&feature=related>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEch68faNDs>

After the reading and/or videos the program leader leads the participants in discussion using the following questions:

- What kind of language was used by the people calling for violence?
- How do you think people may respond to these events?
- Do preventing incitement of hatred and permitting freedom of expression conflict with each other? Why or why not?
- How can we differentiate between legitimate criticism and criticism designed to be hurtful?

### Part C- Inciting violence in our society & Wrap Up

Split participants into 3 different groups and present excerpts of articles in the appendices to read about different hate expression issues in the US news such as: inciting for violence against Obama, anti-Muslim expression, and anti-gay expression (Appendix 3). Give the groups some time for an open-ended discussion, within they will share between themselves the thoughts and emotions they have regarding the issue they have just read.

After 15-20 minutes the groups will be brought back to wrap up by discussing the following:

- What were your articles about?
- Who was saying what about whom?
- Do you think that hate speech incites violence?
- What effect does this have on different populations?
- What other kinds of hate speech can be commonly found?
- Have you ever heard people in your community using hateful or inciting for violence language? If so, where? How can we address those in our community who do?
- How can we start to look at our own speech and recognize whether it is hateful or not?
- What can we do to respond to hateful or inciting for violence speech when we encounter it in our lives?

# Appendix 1

## CHILDHOOD

Yitzhak Rabin was born in Jerusalem in 1922 to Nehemiah and Rosa, two pioneers of the Third Aliyah. Rabin grew up in Tel Aviv, where the family relocated when he was one year old. In 1940, he graduated with distinction from the Kadoori Agricultural High School and hoped to be an irrigation engineer. However, apart from several courses in military strategy in the United Kingdom later on, he never pursued a degree.

Political tensions were rising in the region, and in 1941, during his practical training at kibbutz Ramat Yohanan, Rabin joined the Palmach, a Jewish militia that was eventually transformed into the Israeli Defense Force.

“At an age when most youngsters are struggling to unravel the secrets of mathematics and the mysteries of the Bible; at an age when first love blooms; at the tender age of sixteen, I was handed a rifle so that I could defend myself.

That was not my dream. I wanted to be a water engineer. I studied in an agricultural school and I thought being a water engineer was an important profession in the parched Middle East. I still think so today. However, I was compelled to resort to the gun.”

## MILITARY LIFE

The first operation Rabin participated in was assisting the allied invasion of Lebanon, then held by Vichy French in June-July 1941. By 1947, he had risen to the position of Chief Operations Officer of the *Palmach*. During the 1948 War of Independence, Rabin directed Israeli operations in Jerusalem and fought the Egyptian army in the Negev.

In 1964, Rabin was appointed Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Under his command, the IDF achieved victory over Egypt, Syria and Jordan in the Six-Day War in 1967. After the Old City of Jerusalem was captured by the IDF, Rabin was among the first to visit the Old City, and delivered a famous speech on Mount Scopus, at the Hebrew University. In the days leading up to the war, it was reported that Rabin suffered a nervous breakdown and was unable to function. After this short hiatus, he resumed full command over the IDF. Following his retirement from the IDF he became ambassador to the United States beginning in 1968, serving for five years.

“The nation was exalted and many wept when they heard of the capture of the Old City. Our Sabra youth, and certainly our soldiers, have no taste for sentimentality and shrink from any public show of emotion. In this instance, however, the strain of battle and the anxiety which preceded it joined with the sense of deliverance, the sense of standing at the very heart of Jewish history, to break the shell of hardness and diffidence, stirring up springs of feelings and spiritual discovery. The paratroopers who conquered the Wall leaned on its stones and wept. It was an act which in its symbolic meaning can have few parallels in the history of nations. We in the army are not in the habit of speaking in high-flown language, but the revelation at that hour at the Temple Mount, a profound truth manifesting itself as if by lightning, overpowered customary constraints.”

## POLITICAL LIFE AND THE PEACE PROCESS

In 1992 Rabin was elected as chairman of the Labor Party, winning against Shimon Peres. In the elections that year his party, strongly focusing on the popularity of its leader, managed to win a clear victory and

Rabin became Israel's prime minister for the second time (first time was between the years (1974-1977). leading the first Labor-led government in fifteen years.

Rabin played a leading role in the signing of the Oslo Accords, which created the Palestinian National Authority and granted it partial control over parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank. During this term of office, Rabin also oversaw the signing of the Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace in 1994.

For his role in the creation of the Oslo Accords, Rabin was awarded the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize, along with Yasser Arafat and Shimon Peres. The Accords greatly divided Israeli society, with some seeing Rabin as a hero for advancing the cause of peace and some seeing him as a traitor for giving away land rightfully belonging to Israel. Many Israelis on the right wing often blame him for Jewish deaths in terror attacks, attributing them to the Oslo agreements.

"We say to you today in a loud and a clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough! We have no desire for revenge. We harbor no hatred towards you. We, like you, are people who want to build a home, to plant a tree, to love, to live side by side with you in dignity, in empathy, as human beings, as free men. We are today giving peace a chance, and saying again to you: Enough. Let us pray that a day will come when we all will say: Farewell to the arms." (At The Signing Of The Declaration of Principles, September 1993)

### ASSASSINATION

On 4 November 1995, Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir, a radical right-wing Orthodox Jew who opposed the signing of the Oslo Accords and believed he was saving the country from a dire fate. The shooting took place in the evening as Rabin was leaving a mass rally in Tel Aviv in support of the Oslo process. Rabin was rushed to the nearby Ichilov Hospital, where he died on the operating table of blood loss and a punctured lung within 40 minutes. Amir was immediately seized by Rabin's bodyguards. He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to life imprisonment. The assassination of Rabin came as a great shock to the Israeli public and much of the rest of the world. Hundreds of thousands of grieving Israelis thronged the square where Rabin was assassinated, which has since been named "Kikar (square) Rabin" in his honor. Young people, in particular, turned out in large numbers, lighting memorial candles and singing peace songs to mourn his death. Rabin's funeral was attended by many world leaders, among them U.S. president Bill Clinton, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan.

"I have always believed that the majority of the people want peace and are ready to take risks for peace. In coming here today, you demonstrate, together with many others who did not come, that the people truly desire peace and oppose violence. Violence erodes the basis of Israeli democracy. It must be condemned and isolated. This is not the way of the State of Israel. In a democracy there can be differences, but the final decision will be taken in democratic elections, as the 1992 elections which gave us the mandate to do what we are doing, and to continue on this course." (Rabin's Final Speech – November 1995)

## Appendix 2

### Murder in the Name of God: Where Religious Extremism Can Lead

In this well-researched book, which includes an exclusive interview with Amir, authors Michael Karpin and Ina Friedman, present the full story of the people whose words and deeds made Rabin's assassination possible: the rabbis who condemned Rabin by invoking an arcane talmudic ruling; the politicians who joined in a sophisticated campaign of incitement against him; the militant West Bank settlers for whom the Oslo peace agreement spelled betrayal; and the security agents who saw what was coming but failed to prevent it.

#### *Goldstein's Funeral*

Amir told the authors that he traveled to Kiryat Arba to attend Goldstein's funeral and meet the community in which he had lived, "I wanted first of all to get to know them . . . So I went there and saw all the thousands who were at the funeral. I saw the love they had for him, and I understood that this is no simple matter. I spoke with the people and began to understand that they were not simply fanatic extremists. They are people who are fighting very hard for the nation, for whom values are very important . . . It began after Goldstein. That's when I had the idea that it's necessary to take Rabin down."

Amir came to know the zealots in Kiryat Arba and Hebron. He grew close to Rabbi Moshe Levinger, a leader of the settler movement who had been convicted of killing a Palestinian and who had pronounced Rabin responsible for the Goldstein massacre. When the Oslo Agreement was signed in Washington on September 13, 1993, Amir, watching the proceedings on television, thought to himself, "If there's no choice, it will be necessary to take Rabin down."

For years, the authors show, the Israeli government turned a blind eye to religious extremism, even when it led to violence. In the middle of 1984, a number of covert cells dubbed the Jewish Underground were discovered. Composed of 27 people, including prominent figures in Gush Emunim, the settler movement, the Underground had planned to execute a number of terrorist actions against Palestinians. The first of these operations targeted the mayors of three West Bank cities. Bombs that exploded in their booby-trapped cars severely maimed two of the mayors; one, Bassam Shaka of Nablus, had both legs blown off. The second operation was a "raid" on the campus of the Islamic University in Hebron, during which indiscriminate gunfire resulted in the deaths of three Palestinian students. The third operation, in which members of the Underground planted bombs on Arab buses in Jerusalem, was thwarted as the devices were being set. Under interrogation some of the terrorists confessed to the most ambitious plan of all: a plot to blow up the Mosque of Omar (Dome of the Rock) on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, to clear the way for building the Third Temple.

#### *Death A Legitimate Goal*

The rhetoric of the Israeli ultra-Orthodox political groups preceding the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the authors declare, "made it clear that Rabin's death was a legitimate, even a religious goal."

Eyakim Ha'etzni, a 67 year old lawyer, founder of the Yesha Council, the voice of the West Bank settler movement, a former Knesset member from the defunct radical right Tehiya Party, was one of three former Knesset members who signed an open letter in November 1993 calling upon soldiers and police to defy orders to evacuate settlements and warning that relinquishing any territory to the Palestinians would spark a civil war. In March 1995 he again tried to spur the army to revolt by telling the head of the Israel Defense Force's Central Command, during a heated meeting with settlers in Hebron: "In Hitler's Germany there were officers who understood that their government was leading the German people to oblivion, and they stood up and threw down their insignia and paid for it with their lives. Here the government is leading the people to oblivion."

Ha'Etzni also harped on the alleged parallel between Rabin's government and the collaborationist Vichy regime in France during World War II: "Those loyal to the Greater Land of Israel have the right to declare a government that gives up territory is an illegal one, just as De Gaulle declared the Vichy Government illegal." He even drew a direct parallel between Rabin and Vichy leader Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain, saying: "We will treat (the signing of the Oslo Agreement) as collaboration with the Nazis was treated in occupied France . . . This is an act of treason, and it's unavoidable that the day will come when Rabin is tried for this act as Pétain was."

### *Vicious Crusade*

The ultra-Orthodox weekly *Hashavna* ("The Week") was used by its publisher, Asher Zuckerman, to wage a vicious crusade against Rabin. The magazine regularly called the prime minister "a Kapo," "an anti-Semite," "ruthless," and "a pathological liar." The weekly, which is read by close to 20 percent of the ultra-Orthodox community, published a symposium on the question of whether Rabin deserved to die and the appropriate means of executing him. It also described the prime minister as mentally ill and suffering from alcoholism. "Senior figures," a lead article stated in March 1993, "report signs of deterioration in the emotional condition of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin."

Members of the Likud establishment expressed similar views. *Hashavna* published an interview with Ariel Sharon, who spoke of the Oslo peace policy as "graver than what Pétain did," adding, "It's hard to use the word 'treason' when speaking of Jews, but there's no substantive difference. They're sitting with Arafat and planning how to deceive the citizens of Israel." In March 1995, Zuckerman wrote of a talk he had with Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu. He quotes Netanyahu as saying: "Rabin charges that he's called a terrible word 'murderer.' But with all the unpleasantness (implied by that term) he has no reason to complain. Whoever is aware of the fetters he placed on soldiers' hands have led directly to the murder of a large number of Jews has difficulty refraining from use of the terrible word 'murder.'"

By the critical summer of 1995 *Hashavna* went so far as to charge that Rabin and Peres "are leading the state and its citizens to annihilation and must be placed before a firing squad." In the issue published on Friday, November 3, 1995, the day before the assassination, Zuckerman (under the pen name A. Barak) offered his readers the forecast that, "The day will come when the Israeli public will bring Rabin and Peres into court with the alternatives being the gallows or the insane asylum. This nefarious duo has either lost its mind or is flagrantly treasonous."

### *Agitation in U.S.*

Within Orthodox circles in the U.S. the same agitation against Yitzhak Rabin followed the signing of the Oslo Agreement. "Soon after Oslo," the authors write, "Rabin's opponents in the American Jewish community began branding him a traitor and a *rodef*;" it was not long before they advanced to calling him a Nazi. By the summer of 1995 the invective showered on the prime minister and his government had become so savage that Israel's consul general in New York, Colette Avital, could restrain herself no longer. Avital knew that right-wing and Orthodox Jews were providing the extremists in Israel with inspiration and a great deal of money . . . She felt it was her duty to warn the prime minister what was going on . . . Supporters of peace in New York seemed unable to utter more than a murmur of protest as Orthodox rabbis and right-wing radicals called for the disposal of the prime minister of Israel. Avital was appalled."

The World Likud (an extension of the Israeli party) swamped Orthodox synagogues in the U.S. with leaflets assailing the Israeli government. Rabbi Mordechai Friedman, head of the Orthodox American Board of Rabbis, took up the banner by charging in radio and t.v. interviews that, "Rabin's democracy is persecuting the settlers" and that, "The Israeli Army has been transformed into the ultra radical left wing Rabin/Peres militia." Rabbi Moshe Tendler, a professor at Yeshiva University and respected authority on the halacha, informed the media that according to Jewish religious law anyone perceived as a *rodef* should be killed.

On June 19, 1995, addressing a convention of the International Rabbinical Coalition for Israel, an organization of Orthodox rabbis dedicated to saving the occupied territories for Israel, Rabbi Abraham Hecht, head of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, declared that surrendering any part of the biblical Land of Israel is a violation of Jewish religious law and, thus, assassinating Rabin, and all who assist him, is both permissible and necessary. The authors note that, "Some of the rabbis supported Hecht and actually signed a statement that in their view Rabin was a *rodef*. Others were stunned by his pronouncement of such a dictum in public, visited his Brooklyn office and implored him to retract the statement. But Hecht was adamant. 'I do not represent myself but the Jewish law,' he told them, 'and the concession of territory is a grave crime in Judaism.'"

### *Extreme Action*

Rabbi Hecht would not be silenced. In August 1995 he used the platform of the *Jewish Press* to publish an open letter "to all the Rabbis in the U.S.A." confirming that, "The Torah permits the most extreme action against those who would harm fellow Jews." He also issued a declaration that the Israeli officers sent to the U.S. to explain the Oslo peace plan "are not wanted here and we must be prepared to expose them for what they are: enemies of the Jewish state and the Jewish people." On October 9, 1995, *New York Magazine* asked Hecht how he would feel if someone were to conclude from his June statement that he was entitled to murder Rabin, Hecht replied: "I wouldn't feel at all . . . Rabin is not a Jew any longer . . . All I said was that according to Jewish law, any person . . . who willfully, consciously, intentionally hands over human bodies or human property or the human wealth of the Jewish people to an alien people is guilty of the sin for which the penalty is death. And . . . it says very clearly, if a man kills him, he has done a good deed."

## Appendix 3

### Tyler Clementi, student outed as gay on internet, jumps to his death

Gay student Tyler Clementi whose roommate allegedly streamed video of him having sex with a man killed himself the next day

His last words, posted on Facebook about 10 minutes before he died, were brief and to the point: "Jumping off the gw bridge sorry."

The comment gave no hint of the torment and mortification that lay behind the decision of gifted 18-year-old violinist Tyler Clementi to throw himself off the George Washington bridge last week.

The cruel details began to emerge today when the body of a man believed to be Clementi was dragged out of the Hudson river at the northern end of Manhattan. At the same time, charges were brought against two of his fellow first-year students at Rutgers university in New Jersey. Like him, they are both 18. They have been accused of invading Clementi's privacy.

One was Dharun Ravi, his roommate at college, the other Ravi's friend Molly Wei, who had a room on the same corridor. On the evening of Sunday 19 September, according to the account given by police, Clementi asked his roommate to give him some time alone in the room they shared.

Ravi agreed, and went down the hall into Wei's room. There, he allegedly logged onto Wei's computer and used it to access through Skype a webcam he had set up on his own computer back in the room he shared with Clementi.

It is not known whether what happened next was accidental or preconceived, but Ravi and Wei are alleged to have watched Clementi in what authorities described as a "sexual encounter" with another man.

It is claimed that Ravi then streamed the video live, and that same night broadcast to the 150 followers of his Twitter feed details of his voyeuristic escapade, outing Clementi in the process: "Roommate asked for the room till midnight. I went into molly's room and turned on my webcam. I saw him making out with a dude. Yay."

Two evenings later, Ravi tweeted: "Anyone with iChat, I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9.30 and 12. Yes it's happening again."

The next day, having told no one about his despair and leaving no clues to his decision other than the Facebook comment, Clementi is thought to have made the hour's drive from Rutgers to the bridge, leaving his car, his wallet and mobile phone on a side road before leaping to his death.

News of the tragedy led to an outpouring of anger and outrage from Rutgers students and on the [internet](#). Gay and lesbian groups on the campus held vigils last Wednesday, carrying posters saying "We're here, we're queer".

More than 15,000 people subscribed to a [Facebook group honouring Clementi](#).

In a statement, his family said that "Tyler was a fine young man, and a distinguished musician. The family is heartbroken beyond words."

Rutger's president, [Richard McCormick, said](#) that if the allegations against Ravi and Wei proved true, they "gravely violate the university's standards of decency and humanity". He pointed to the coincidence that the university has this week launched a two-year programme to encourage "civility" within the social life of the campus.

Clementi was described by acquaintances as a shy and self-contained student. He was three weeks into his university career, so few other freshers at Rutgers had got to know him.

His passion was the violin. He played in the front row of the second violins in the [symphony orchestra of his home town, Ridgewood](#), New Jersey. Diane Wade, a fellow violinist in the orchestra, [told the New Jersey Star-Ledger](#) that "he was so incredibly talented – I could not believe how good he was for such a young boy".

Ravi and Wei have both been charged with four counts of invasion of privacy, the most serious of which carries a maximum sentence of five years. Bail conditions of \$25,000 (£16,000) have been imposed on Ravi.

Clementi's suicide is the latest example of the damage that can be inflicted when the age-old habit of pranks between teenagers meets the huge social power of technology.

Examples abound, such as the 18-year-old pupil in Cincinnati who hanged herself in 2008 after her former boyfriend circulated among classmates mobile phone images of her naked.

## Supreme Court Debates Protest Limits

Anti-gay activists argued before the Supreme Court today that they should be allowed to protest at military funerals.

The debate centered on whether the Westboro Baptist Church had a First Amendment right to hold signs such as "God hates you," and, "God hates dead soldiers," outside the funeral of a deceased Marine.

Albert Snyder, the soldier's father, argued that the activists invaded his privacy during the 2006 protest in Maryland and intentionally inflicted emotional distress on him and his family.

Margie Phelps, the daughter of Westboro's pastor Fred Phelps and the lawyer for the church, retorted that her group was exercising free speech on a matter of public debate—the Iraq war.

"This is a case about exploiting a private family's grief," Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg said during Wednesday's arguments. Justice Anthony Kennedy boiled it down to a debate over harassing conduct versus public speech.

For activists, the case could draw new lines on where protests are appropriate. Powerful groups back both positions.

The Westboro Baptist Church received support from groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and Liberty Counsel that are concerned about upholding free speech.

The Snyder family presented briefs from American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the state of Kansas—where the Westboro activists live—and 42 senators including the leaders of both parties.

The two sides faced sharp questions from the court Wednesday on whether activists making personal attacks near a private setting should have free-speech protections.

In the past, the Supreme Court has upheld the privacy rights of individuals who are not public figures.

Phelps tried to make the case that Snyder became a public figure when he spoke to the media about his son's death, but the justices pointed out that families regularly contact newspapers about obituaries for the deceased.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor said the question was "at what point and how do we accept personal attacks" as part of freedom of speech.

But the justices were equally tough on Snyder's counsel, questioning how he could claim damages considering that the protest was held 1,000 feet away from the gravesite. Snyder and his family did not see the signs until they turned on the television later that day.

Justice Elena Kagan asked whether "public speech, if directed to a private figure, should be treated differently under the law," asking the plaintiff to point out a case with that precedent.

Sean Summers, Snyder's attorney, said he could not cite such a Supreme Court ruling on that which involved a private figure.

"I would hope that the First Amendment wasn't enacted to harass people at private funerals," he added.

Outside the courtroom, both camps claimed victory, though the justices will probably not hand down a decision for months.

"There's no line that can be drawn here without shutting down speech," Phelps told reporters.

A dozen members of her church stood close by, holding signs that said, "God is your enemy," and, "Fags doom nations."

Students from Maryland, where Snyder was buried, held a counter protest with signs that said, "Love," and, "WBC, Thanks for making acceptance, tolerance, and love look reasonable."

Josh Santangelo, a counterprotester who is gay, called the Westboro messages hateful and hurtful but said activists should be able to express their views as long as they do not invade someone else's privacy.

Snyder, speaking softly to reporters in the background, offered a retort.

"The Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church's conduct was so extreme that it went beyond all possible boundaries of basic human decency," he said. "It could be regarded as utterly intolerable in a civilized nation

## Concern grows over anti-Islam wave in United States

Washington - A much-publicized wave of anti-Islam sentiment in the United States prompted warnings from the country's top military officials Tuesday.

The US Armed Forces are worried about the effects that such feelings might have on the security of their troops fighting in a country with strong Islamic underpinnings such as Afghanistan.

It was a little-known evangelical Christian church with just 50 members in Gainesville, Florida, the Dove World Outreach Center, that triggered the latest reactions.

The church's leader, Pastor Terry Jones, plans to hold the 'International Burn a Koran Day' Saturday, to mark the ninth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The top US military commander in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, has warned against the plan, saying it could end up harming US soldiers.

'It is precisely the kind of action the Taliban uses and could cause significant problems,' Petraeus said in a statement. 'Not just here, but everywhere in the world we are engaged with the Islamic community.'

US Lieutenant General William Caldwell, who is responsible for the training of Afghan security forces, also warned against the incineration plans, saying that they would 'jeopardize the safety of our men and women that are serving over here in the country.'

He noted that many Afghans don't understand that the Koran-burning is protected by the US constitutional right to freedom of expression and that President Barack Obama cannot simply forbid it.

The US Embassy in Kabul itself issued a statement to reaffirm 'US respect for Islam' and to distance itself from 'acts of disrespect' against this religion.

But the Koran-burning plan already led to a demonstration Monday at a Kabul mosque, where hundreds of Afghan citizens burned US flags amid shouts of 'Death to America,' according to media reports.

'The United States government in no way condones such acts of disrespect against the religion of Islam, and is deeply concerned about deliberate attempts to offend members of religious or ethnic groups,' the embassy in Kabul said of Koran-burning plans.

The memory of protests and vandalism across the Muslim world in 2006 over the publication in Denmark of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed is still fresh in many minds, and the lives of the caricatures' authors are at risk to this day following threats from Islamic militants.

The man who triggered the latest controversy, Jones - who wrote a book entitled 'Islam is of the Devil,' - insisted Tuesday that he would carry through his Koran-burning plan although he is 'weighing the situation' in the wake of Petraeus' comments, and 'praying.'

But the truth is that burning the Koran is only the tip of an iceberg of anti-Islamic sentiment that is growing as September 11 approaches. This year, moreover, the date coincides with the end of the Muslim fasting month, Ramadan.

Plans to build an Islamic centre complete with a mosque near Ground Zero, the site of the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York, spurred a controversy that has gotten tangled up with political campaigning ahead of the November 2 midterm legislative election.

Similar incidents around plans to build mosques have also taken place in states like Tennessee, Wisconsin and California, prompting fears in the country's Islamic community. US Muslims have started to feel harassed, launching their own initiatives to try to put a brake on the wave of anti-Islamic sentiment.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) drew up a manual for US Muslims to present their religion in a positive way, which also gives them tips on what to do if faced with incidents in mosques.

It has also launched an advertising campaign with the title '9/11 Happened to Us All,' which remembers the fact that there were many Muslims in the rescue teams that were active in New York's Twin Towers on that day of terror.

In the same spirit, a group of Muslim 'citizens' has launched an Internet campaign under the motto 'I'm An American, I'm A Muslim,' which calls for tolerance and stresses that US Muslims are not out to impose their faith on anyone else.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which fights anti-semitism, announced Tuesday the creation of an Interfaith Coalition on Mosques, to 'carefully monitor incidents of mosque discrimination around the country, the organization said in a statement.

'We believe the best way to uphold America's democratic values is to ensure that Muslims can exercise the same religious freedom

enjoyed by everyone in America,' the coalition said in its statement of purpose.

But such feelings appear very far from those of a good portion of US public opinion these days.

## NC: Obama target of violent, racist graffiti at college campus

I am not surprised at this. Expect to see even more episodes of ignorance and bigotry as we move toward the inauguration of Barack Obama. We had some of the most wretched McCain Mob behavior here in NC -- a reporter kicked to the ground while covering a Palin rally, 30+ cars with tires slashed by goons at an Obama rally, and a dead bear cub left on a college campus with Obama signs stapled to its head. The cretins who did this l-o-s-t; our state turned Blue, and they have a lot of anger that is going to manifest itself in an anti-social manner. This is the behavior the Republicans cultivated and unleashed in 2008. They own it. - promoted by Pam Spaulding

NC State will never live down its horrible reputation as the most backward, most hate-filled college campus in North Carolina. If they were located in South Carolina, their only competitor might be Bob Jones University.

In case you haven't heard about it yet, four NC State students have admitted to painting violent, threatening and racist graffiti directed toward President-elect Barack Obama in the campus' Free Expression Tunnel. Some of the spray-painted messages included "Shoot Obama" and "kill that n----", among others.

A rally of 500 students spoke out against the painting, which occurred late Tuesday night, early Wednesday morning. Other students quickly painted over the wall.

Criminal charges won't be brought against the four students and campus police aren't divulging their identities, citing privacy laws. The students might face disciplinary proceedings under university student conduct codes. The U.S. Secret Service assisted in the investigation due to the violent and threatening nature of the messages.



