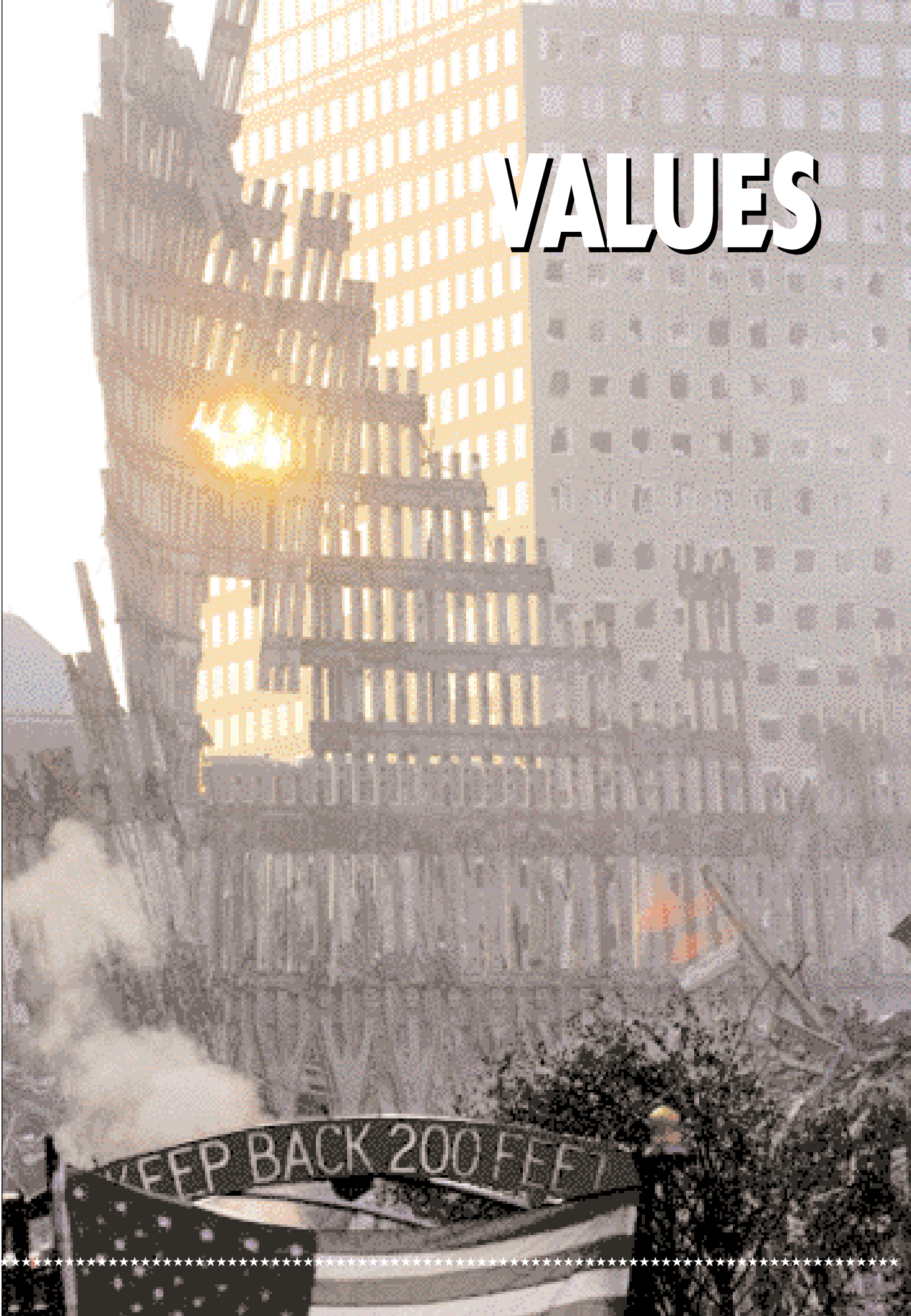




# VALUES





# Beyond scapegoats and stereotypes

## Four ways newspapers can help resist hate and hysteria directed at American Muslims

By CHARLES HAYNES

The growing number of incidents involving attacks on American Muslims – and other Americans mistaken for Muslims – are stark reminders of how ill-informed many Americans are about Islam. Unfortunately, for many people, this vacuum is being filled by the ignorance and hate circulating on countless Web sites and chat rooms.

Newspapers have a special responsibility at this critical moment to fight against bigotry and to guard against creating scapegoats by reporting accurately and fully the truth about the religious dimensions of this crisis – including the relationship of Islam to the perpetrators of the attacks on our nation.

Here are four suggestions:

• **Use terms carefully.** The terrorists in these attacks may claim to be Muslims motivated by Islam, but that does not make them “Islamic terrorists.” To the contrary, the vast majority of Muslim clerics and scholars agree that the actions of the terrorists are contrary to the teachings of Islam. Moreover, this is no “jihad” in the Quranic meaning of the term. The fact that terrorists pervert the meaning of Islam and Islamic concepts does not mean that reporters should accept these false definitions.

• **Don’t be afraid of religion.** The reluctance of many in the media to tackle the religious dimension of the news has distorted much of the coverage of events that require an understanding of religious worldviews. Religious perspectives are often presented with little or no context (Jerry Falwell’s ill-timed comments on the 700 Club are another current example). Lack of context translates into stories that mention religion but fail to provide an adequate understanding of religious beliefs, practices or historical roots. Americans need to understand why people see the world the way they do if they are to make any sense of

these events – and distinguish among the various voices claiming to be “Christian,” “Islamic” or otherwise.

• **Do your homework.** Few reporters or editors have a background in religious studies. That makes it difficult for newspapers to adequately cover the news in the United States (the most religiously diverse nation in the world) much less the many international events that involve religious issues and convictions. Nevertheless, newspapers have a civic and professional duty to ensure that religious voices are heard in the public square in ways that are fair and balanced. Long-term solutions might include more opportunities for continuing education in religion, more religion specialists among reporters and perhaps a religious-studies requirement for journalism majors. But in the current crisis, reporters can fill the gap by contacting organizations dedicated to promoting accurate education about Islam. One of the best is the Council on Islamic Education ([www.cie.org](http://www.cie.org)). Another helpful resource for understanding the religious landscape of America is the Pluralism Project at Harvard University ([www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)).

• **Teach the controversy.** Muslim leaders in America and in most of the world condemn terrorism (the Quran teaches that taking one life unjustly is like taking the life of all humanity). Nevertheless, there are differences among American Muslims and between Muslims and other faiths about many issues – including many public-policy questions facing the United States. Too often, however, the nuances of the debate within religions and among religions are lost in generalizations about the beliefs and practices of adherents. Most of the most difficult social issues facing Americans – abortion, homosexuality, religion in schools – involve clashes of religious worldviews that are rarely explained in the media. Americans can’t understand these conflicts, much less find common ground with others, without understanding the religious differences among religions and between religions.

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# A patriotic press is a vigilant one

BY KEN PAULSON



**Ken Paulson** is senior vice president of The Freedom Forum and executive director of The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. He is an adjunct professor of law at Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

We're about to find out what freedom of the press really means.

It's a constitutional guarantee that Americans recognize but don't always appreciate. In fact, a First Amendment Center survey taken last spring suggested that 46 percent of Americans believed that the nation's news media had too much freedom.

That was an understandable backlash to often shallow, often cynical saturation coverage of stories with only minimal impact on our lives. This summer it was Gary Condit around the clock, punctuated by shark sightings.

And then the world changed.

Saturation coverage has never looked so good in the wake of the horrific attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Suddenly 24-hour coverage of a single story was welcome.

I first learned of the terrorist attacks shortly after checking into a Johannesburg hotel. My only access to U.S. news media was CNN. While I certainly wasn't comforted by their coverage, I knew that I was getting as much information as possible, as quickly as it became available.

When we all have access to information – unfiltered by the government – we're better able to cope,

even under the most extraordinary circumstances.

The pleasant surprise is that now that the nation's news media have a story that is so massive in scope and so great in importance that they truly can't overplay it, we're seeing remarkable restraint and professionalism.

Although there were far too many replays of the second plane hitting the World Trade Center, most of the television coverage has, in fact, been sensitive and measured, focusing on facts rather than speculation.

Consider this remarkable memo from NBC News executive Bill Wheatley, as reported in USA TODAY: "It's now time to be extremely cautious about what we report. Please take great care to make sure that our broadcasts don't pass along information that could prove helpful to those who would do harm to our citizens, our officials and our military. Let's be careful about reporting specifics of presidential travel, of security arrangements, of secret military plans, troop movements and the like."

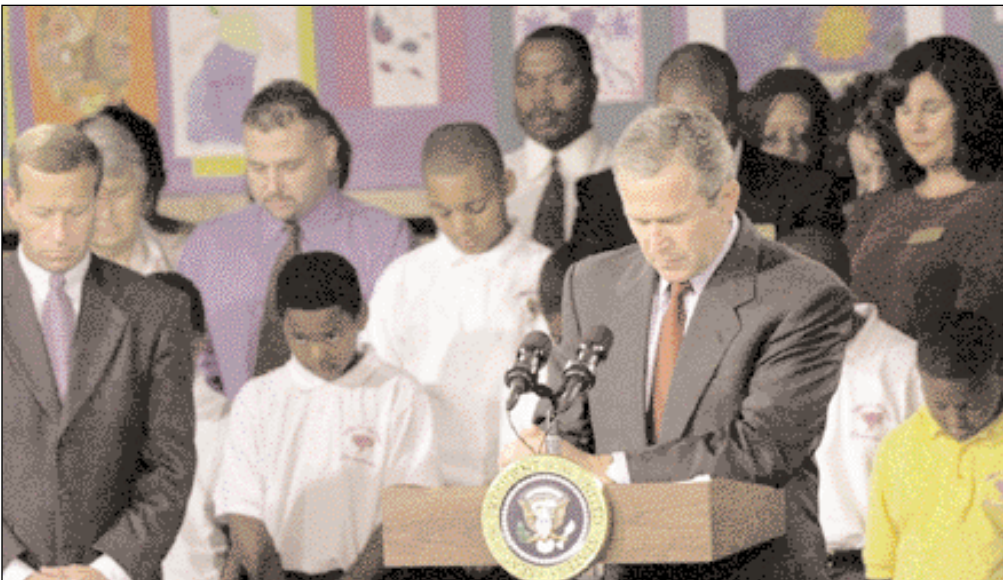
Newspapers also have done a remarkable job, expanding news content to provide in-depth coverage of the story of a lifetime.

Yet the greatest challenges for the nation's news media lie ahead. The real test of press freedom in this nation will

not be reporting what happens, but how and why. Can the nation's press – already sporting red, white and blue logos – live up to its obligation as a true watchdog of government?

It was one thing for the press to challenge an unpopular war like Vietnam. It's quite another to question governmental

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DOUG MILLS / Associated Press





JEFF FRANKO / Gannett News Service

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decisions when the enemy is in our midst and our citizens are casualties.

As Rep. David R. Obey, D-Wis., observed, “The most dangerous time for any democracy is at times of crisis. Asking even the most innocent and basic questions is seen as being non-supportive.” There’s already been a backlash against some reporters. As columnist Mary McGrory reported, “Ask any journalist who raised questions about (the president’s) early handling of the crisis: They have been inundated with furious calls calling them a disgrace to their profession and even traitors.” Maintaining a check on government extends well beyond monitoring this war on terrorism. The Founding Fathers saw freedom of the press as the vehicle with which to protect our other freedoms.

We’ve already heard from many in government that some civil liberties may have to be sacrificed if we are to win this war on terrorism.

House Minority Leader Richard

Gephardt, D-Mo., warned, “We’re in a new world where we have to rebalance freedom and security. We’re not going to have all the openness and freedom that we had.”

The goal is to bolster security without violating the Constitution, but clearly this is a time for vigilance.

As Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., has cautioned, “If the Constitution gets shredded, the terrorists win.”

Journalists do their jobs by exercising our most fundamental freedoms. They have an obligation to speak out when those rights are denied to others. As President Bush told the nation, “We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them.”

A free press can serve as an invaluable watchdog on government actions, without undercutting our national interests. Individual reporters can ask tough questions while wearing flag lapel pins. Professionalism and patriotism can – and must – coexist. The American people are counting on it.

