

Mosque could honor victims

Indestructible American ideas transcend the acts of cold-blooded murderers.



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On a recent trip to Berlin, I looked forward to seeing how the Berliners had decided to remember their infamous wall. This was of particular interest

to me, since Chapman University has a "piece" of the Berlin Wall in a part of our campus that we've named "Liberty Plaza."

What I found in Berlin was a path of bricks, two wide, laid end-to-end and running the full length of the former wall. Most people seemed totally oblivious to this remembrance, walking across the line of bricks as though it weren't even there.

As I walked down the Unter den Linden, not far from the Brandenburg Gate in what was formerly East Berlin, I observed the vibrant flow of people moving unobstructed in every which way. I marveled at how in the span of only 20 years, the power of the free market had virtually eradicated the stifling and sadistic forces of statism. Worn and depressing state-owned, bureaucratic buildings and residences, all with a boring look of sameness, had given way to stylish buildings and bustling commerce. If it weren't for that brick line in the ground, one would be hard-pressed to determine where the former East Berlin started and ended.

Then it struck me how appropriate this artful approach is in remembering the wall. Instead of a barrier, there is openness. And yet, that line of



Matt Sky, left, of Manhattan, N.Y., argues in favor of the proposed Islamic center and mosque to be built near Ground Zero.

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bricks is there to remind people of an artificial barrier. It was a barrier, though, that was doomed from the start. In the end, no man-made wall is strong enough to withstand the unifying forces of family tradition, history and values that bind a people together.

The power of Abraham Lincoln's biblical quotation that surrounds Chapman's Berlin Wall in our Liberty Plaza rings true: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

This all got me thinking about the eight-acre memorial being built at Ground Zero to honor the memory of the 2,982 victims of 9/11 and of the Trade Center bombing in 1993. The memorial plaza will include two square voids marking the site of the twin towers, each containing pools fed by the largest human-engineered waterfalls in the United States.

As workers rush to complete this ambitious project in time for the 10th anniversary of the attack next year, people are picketing over the planned Islamic community center and mosque only two blocks away. While most Americans feel this is a highly insensitive and perhaps even hateful act, I believe that allowing the center and mosque

to be built might be considered a fitting way to honor the victims of Islamic terrorism. This belief of mine might at first glance seem cruelly insensitive to those victims. Still, I think it's worthy of some reflection.

Cold-blooded murderers cruelly killed 2,982 people. In spite of that heinous act, they weren't able to kill an idea. That idea is amazingly powerful. It's what unites us as a country. As a nation of immigrants, the United States is comprised of a racially diverse people with different ethnicities, cultures, values and religions. We share, however, a powerful idea — an idea far stronger than the disparate outward physical appearances and ethnocentric attitudes that otherwise might pull us apart. That idea is more than simply being tolerant — much more. It's a profound appreciation we generally share for the rich and varied diversity that colors our nation.

The terrorists could not kill that. In that regard, they failed utterly and completely. So what greater way is there to memorialize the victims of a failed act than to show that while these victims are physically gone, their idea endures? And it will continue to

endure while the hateful ideas of the murderers are relegated to the trash bin of time.

Allowing a "Ground Zero mosque" would be a testament to the terrorists' ultimate failure. They can demolish buildings; they can barbarically steal peoples' lives; and yes, they can strike fear in the lives of those who survive. But they didn't succeed in taking away an idea that forms the glue that binds our nation together, an idea rooted in the founding of our country: that we have certain unalienable rights and that among them is the freedom to worship as we choose.

That mosque would indeed be a transcendent memorial to that valued freedom. To those who correctly point out that it is grossly insensitive to plan the location of the community center so close to Ground Zero, let us be reminded of our enduring idea: In a nation that places its highest value on basic human rights, freedom of religion trumps the banning of an insensitive religious act — just as freedom of speech trumps the banning of insensitive speech.

On a plaque facing Chapman's Berlin Wall memorial in Liberty Plaza are the words Ronald Reagan gave before he boldly told Mr. Gorbachev to "tear down this wall": "As I looked out a moment ago from the Reichstag, that embodiment of German Unity, I noticed words crudely spray painted upon the wall — perhaps by a young Berliner: 'This wall will fall. Beliefs become reality.' Yes, across Europe, this wall will fall. For it cannot withstand faith. It cannot withstand truth. The wall cannot withstand freedom."