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From the Selected Works of Michael I Niman Ph.D.

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We're Marching Toward Intolerance

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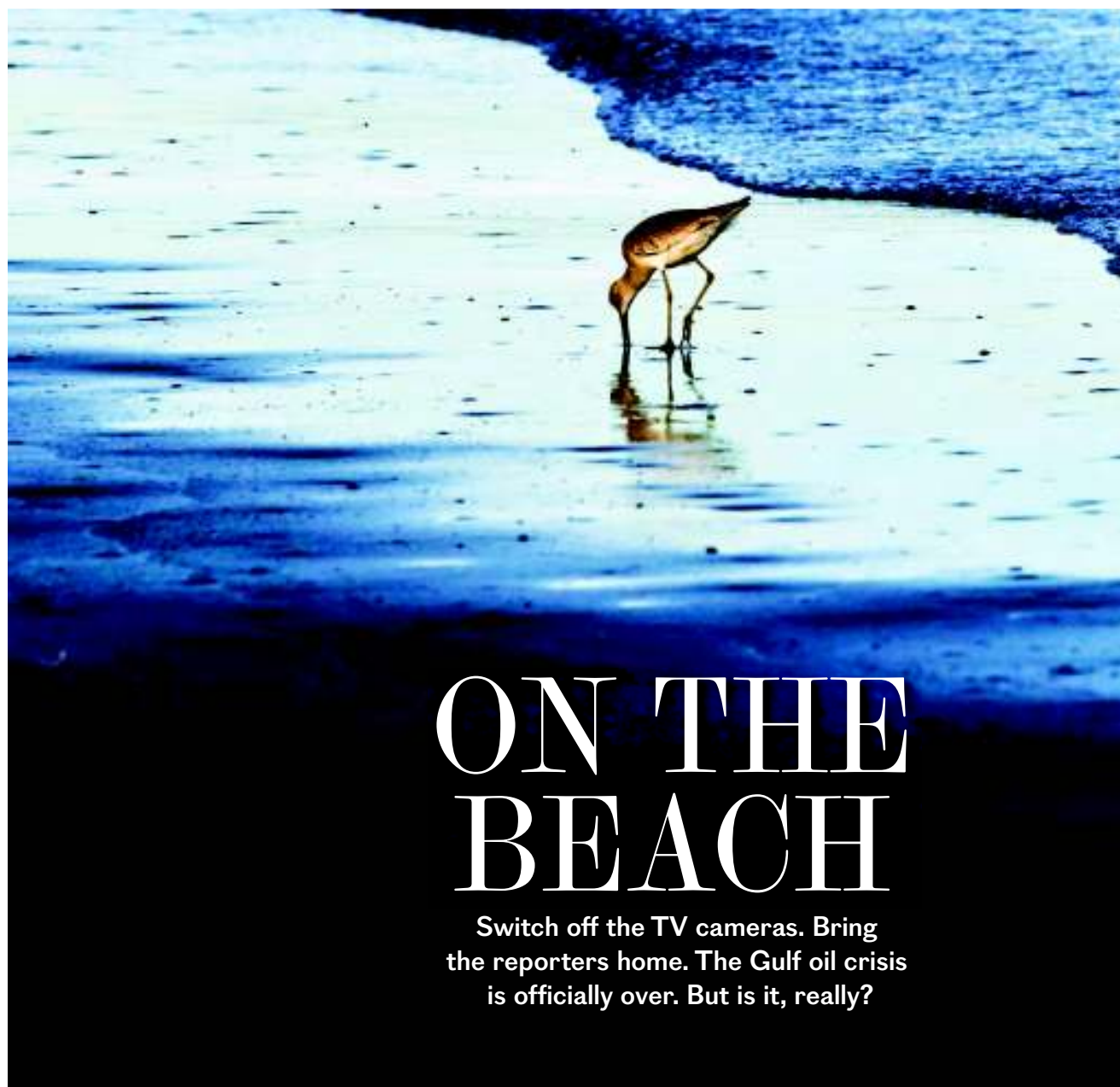
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INSIDE: SECRETS IN ISRAEL'S ARCHIVES ● TOWERING LUNACY ● A PERFECT STORM FOR PROPAGANDA ● BUSH'D AGAIN ● A SPEECH FOR ENDLESS WAR

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ON THE BEACH

Switch off the TV cameras. Bring the reporters home. The Gulf oil crisis is officially over. But is it, really?

The ^{ColdType} READER



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COVER PHOTO: Jess Hurd – A wader feeding on the oily beach at Grand Isle, Louisiana, after the BP oil spill.

We're marching to intolerance

The French are deporting Roma, Americans are furious about a mosque, and **Michael I. Niman** is angry

Things aren't looking too good on the tolerance front lately. In a move darkly reminiscent of the European pogroms of the 1930s, France's beleaguered right-wing president, Nicolas Sarkozy, is ordering mass deportations of ethnic Roma. Like Europe's Jews, who were a minority in every European country before the Holocaust and a majority in none, the Roma are present across the continent as an oppressed minority without an independent homeland. And like the Jews, they were also rounded up by racist governments and sent to concentration camps during the Holocaust. So it's not too much of a stretch to say someone hit the replay button here. Sarkozy's government is borrowing one of the oldest scripts from the playbook, tossing raw meat to the xenophobes by scapegoating a minority, all in order to distract the public from his own government's failings.

The Roma certainly make for an easy target. Most of the world knows them only by the racial slur "gypsies," which is so common that Roma themselves sometimes have been forced to use the term to avoid confusion when talking to an ignorant majority. The "G" word is like the "N" word, only much more popular – so popular, in fact, that the United States' largest news service, the Associated Press, headlined their Sarkozy-friendly article last month:

"France to Repatriate 93 Gypsies to Romania." "The flights," the AP article continues, "are part of a crackdown by France's conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy," who "has linked Gypsies, or Roma, to crime and spearheaded a campaign to dismantle their illegal camps and send some home to Eastern Europe."

If you're feeling a bit smug, thinking maybe us Americans, minus perhaps the AP, are somehow above the amnesiac French, you might want to take a gander at our own nation's own metastasizing "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy. Having trumped catastrophic climate change, the BP oil spill, and all news coverage of pet torturers, this fabricated controversy is emerging at the center of the 2010 Republican election strategy. Muslims, like the Roma in France, are fair game, so the media is plugging away with polls, idiot-on-the-street interviews, and all sorts of intellectual gasoline to fan the flames of this season's hottest non-story story.

Of course it's not exactly a mosque, and it's not exactly at Ground Zero, but hey, it's not exactly a news story, either – then again it seems to be becoming one. The proposed building is actually a 13-story structure with a community pool, a gym and fitness center, a 500-seat auditorium and theater, and a prayer space, which we'll call a "mosque." It would be two blocks over

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HATE MONGERS

This was too much even for the normally fire-breathing Pat Buchanan, who attacked Gingrich for being a “political opportunist”

from the edge of the World Trade Center site, and would contain the neighborhood's third mosque, with the other two being four and 12 blocks away. Houses of worship and cultural centers aren't really anything new in lower Manhattan. For example, St. Paul's Chapel and St. Peter's Church are both less than one block from Ground Zero, the John Street Methodist Church and the Battery Park Synagogue are both one block away, Trinity Church is two blocks away, as is the Amish Market, as would be the new Islamic center. The Museum of Jewish Heritage is five blocks away. You get the idea. There's nothing novel here.

But non-issues like this always bring out our own loony, native-born Sarkozys. Seemingly back from the dead, we have former Republican House Speaker Newt (as in the insect-eating amphibian who's comfy both wallowing in the mud and slithering on dry ground) Gingrich. He's found a ready and willing media machine to disseminate his bile. This “family values” adulterer who sprang divorce papers on his wife as she lay on a hospital bed recovering from cancer surgery recently argued, “Nazis don't have the right to put up a sign next to the Holocaust Museum in Washington,” as if such an abomination would be analogous to American Muslims constructing a community center in lower Manhattan.

He went on to explain that President Barack Obama, a former constitutional attorney, in explaining that an Islamic organization has a legally protected right to construct a community center on its private property, a concept that like family values is a cornerstone of Republican identity,

was actually “pandering to radical Islam.” This was too much even for the normally fire-breathing Pat Buchanan, who attacked Gingrich for being a “political opportunist.” Perhaps Newt's courting the loonier-than-Palin vote.

Carl's madmen

But it gets better. Buffalo, NY, developer Carl Paladino, now a contender for the Republican nomination for New York governor, is also grandstanding on the issue, apparently courting the loonier-than-Newt vote. According to Paladino, “This isn't about moderate, peace-loving Muslims; this is about a sect of radical fundamentalist Islamists who attacked our nation and who are tied to this mosque by an ideology of hate... This is the same ideology that advocates stoning women and gay people to death.”

Okay. So Paladino doesn't want to stone women to death, but that's about as liberal as he gets on the gender front. This is the same Carl Paladino who was distributing internet bestiality pornography to his email circle, including a rather explicit photo of a horse penetrating a woman's vagina.

The gubernatorial hopeful, a darling of New York's Tea Party, defended himself, explaining to the *Buffalo News* that he only sent the bestiality pornography to “a very specific bunch of friends.” No biggie – just guy fun. It seems that Paladino either really likes horses or he really hates women, or perhaps both.

Another Paladino email contained a photo of a plane about to crash on a group of running black children, with the caption, “Run Nigger, Run.” This also, no doubt,

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went to a very specific group of friends.

These misogynist and racist emails were made public early in the campaign, when Paladino was relatively unknown across the state. Rather than kill his fledging candidacy, the scandal seems to have ignited it. Hell, everyone sends that sort of stuff to a very specific group of friends, folks said. Carl's just a victim of the liberal media.

Today that same media has all but forgotten about Carl the racist bestiality fetishist, and regrooved him into Paladino the populist. Not a madman, but a man with a message. And hence, in this better-than-France country of ours, suddenly thousands of other madmen are peppering their dandelion-free lawns with "I'm Mad Too Carl" signs. Make of it what you will.

Of course we shouldn't easily dismiss Paladino and the loonier-than-Newt crowd as just being good for a few hoots. They might very well have some staying power, at least in the Republican party. A recent Pew poll found that a full 18 percent of Americans, and 41 percent of Republicans, now believe that the Hawaiian-born Obama was either "probably" or "definitely" born in a foreign country. As for his birth certificate? Well, the Kenyans put it there in Honolulu back in 1961, knowing their sleeper agent would one day dupe the country into electing him president. **CT**

Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and media studies at Buffalo State College, New York

Diversity is a thin veneer under which any bigot who supports corporate tax cuts can get a pass

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt

