



Sunday, October 22, 2006

Letters: Ethnic distinctions discourage dialogue

The recent article, "Ethnic tension inflames contest" [Local, Oct. 11], reported that Arab and Muslim groups "are condemning a letter circulated by a Republican leader warning that an Arab-American candidate holds 'extremist' views."

The article says that Shawn Steel sent an e-mail "that accuses Anaheim City Council candidate Bill Dalati of holding 'extremist' views and participating in an 'anti-American' rally." I am not writing to debate whether anyone did or did not participate in anti-American rallies or whether they hold extremist views since I do not know all of the circumstances in this case.

I take exception to being classified as "one of three Arab-American candidates in city elections." The article mentions me and says "Costa Mesa Mayor Allan Mansoor, of Egyptian descent, is up for re-election." It also mentions Alin Hamade who is from Lebanon and running for a seat on the Westminster City Council, and Dalati who is from Syria and running for a seat in Anaheim.

The writer mentions the term Arab-American but does not say if Shawn Steel made that distinction. It seems that Steel's concern was not that this issue involved an "Arab-American" but the alleged actions of the person. If that is the case, then the title of the story should have read "Reporters and editors purposeful selection of divisionary labeling creates ethnic tension and inflames contest."

One's geographic origin should not be used to describe someone when discussing his or her actions. If you do that, it must be done equally for everyone or you are being divisive. Describing me as an "Arab-American" has no bearing on what views I hold or why I am running for re-election. If you make these distinctions for one, then make them for all. Please don't lump me into some group out of laziness or political correctness.

My father, though born in Egypt and with an Arabic name, was greatly influenced by European culture. Many business contacts were European and he attended a French Catholic school where he was taught in French. He was also raised as a Christian in a Coptic Church as opposed to a Muslim. My mother is from Finland and when I was raised my mother took me and my brothers to a Lutheran church. Actually my mother is from the Aland Islands which are

in the Gulf of Bothnia. Swedish is the culture but the islands are a province of Finland. I was born in California and one could also argue that since my mother was a stay at home mom, Swedish culture was more prevalent in our home than Middle Eastern culture. English was the language in our home and I would argue that we grew up with an American culture.

Egypt is on the continent of Africa, does that make me African-American? What if I had two parents from Europe, would you be pointing out that I was European-American? And why didn't they say I was a Swedish-American? Or should I be listed as Egyptian-American, or Swedish-Egyptian American, or does Arab or Egyptian come first?

So why then should the origin of one's last name be used to describe you? Is it because people are becoming lazy and don't want to engage in meaningful dialogue with others to determine their beliefs and values? The other two so-called Arab-Americans are probably equally different. But we won't know because it is just used to divide people, not to encourage dialogue.

Interestingly, I did not see Michael Monsoor of Garden Grove, the recently killed Navy Seal, referred to as an Arab-American ["Supreme sacrifice," Oct. 14]. It was good that he was not referred to in this manner because he was fighting as an American soldier.

I am proud of my parents and my heritage, but I am an American – without a hyphen.

Allan R. Mansoor
Mayor of Costa Mesa

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