

WTC SHRINE 'HIJACK'

By **DAN MANGAN**

June 9, 2005 -- A World Trade Center Memorial Foundation director is raising a storm over the International Freedom Center planned for Ground Zero, charging that it will slight memories of 9/11 by staging exhibits that have nothing to do with the tragedy.

Debra Burlingame also says that some people involved in the Freedom Center have a blame-America political bent and have undermined the war on terror.

She has raised the specter of the Freedom Center being used to teach about Native American genocide, lynchings in the South, the Holocaust, Chinese dissidents and abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

"I think the American people will be shocked" when the Freedom Center opens its doors in 2010, said Burlingame, whose brother Charles "Chic" Burlingame was the pilot of the American Airlines flight that was flown into the Pentagon on 9/11.

In a Wall Street Journal opinion piece on Tuesday, Burlingame raised questions about Freedom Center head Tom Bernstein, who she notes is the president of Human Rights First. The group has sued on behalf of terror detainees in Iraq and Afghanistan.

She also cites several academics and others, among the dozens of advisers to the Freedom Center, as a "Who's Who of the human rights, Guantanamo-obsessed world."

Burlingame said she objects to the center conducting a "civics lesson" about freedom in general, instead of specifically memorializing the dead and "the strength and resiliency of the American people" on 9/11.

She also predicted that the Freedom Center would turn Ground Zero into a freewheeling free-speech zone that will "attract wackos from every part of the political spectrum" to debate politicized issues, including what led to the 9/11 attacks.

Burlingame said she is upset that the Freedom Center will take up 300,000 square feet above ground at the trade center site, while the memorial itself — which will exhibit 9/11 artifacts — is allocated just 50,000 square feet, below ground.

"She's right on the money," said Lee Ielpi, Burlingame's colleague on the memorial board and the father of a firefighter killed on 9/11.

But John Bridgeland, a director of the Freedom Center and President Bush's former domestic-policy council director, said he was "mystified" by Burlingame's charges.

"We've have made such a strong effort to keep this nonpartisan," he said.

Memorial Foundation President Gretchen Dykstra said, "We have every confidence that [the Freedom Center] will maintain its neutrality and its impartiality as it helps people reflect on 9/11."

Columbia University history professor and Freedom Center adviser Eric Foner — who was cited in Burlingame's Journal article as a "radical-left history professor" — told The Post yesterday: "I get messages saying, 'I hope you get hit by a bus, you're an enemy of America, we should take care of you.'"

In the article, Burlingame noted that Foner hosted a "teach-in" at Columbia at which another professor called for a "million Mogadishus" to be inflicted on the U.S. military.

"I actually condemned the speaker for those comments," Foner said yesterday.

"[Burlingame's] characterization of me is so misleading, it's so partial, it's so obviously political, she just doesn't know what she's talking about when it comes to me and that makes me wonder whether she knows what she's talking about in other things in the piece."