

OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. - The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Controversial cartoons spark international outrage

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Newspapers don't tell people why things happen; they only say what happened over and over again. To demonstrate this point, I present the explanation to my news article.

It all started in the Danish broadsheet newspaper, Politiken, on Sept. 17, 2005. The publication ran an article with the headline "Deep fear of criticism of Islam." This article came about when Kåre Bluitgen, Danish author and journalist, wrote "The Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad." Bluitgen was having difficulty finding an illustrator for the book. Eventually an artist agreed to pen the illustrations anonymously. Prior to this, three artists had declined to participate.

One of the refusing artists cited a case of assault in Oct. 2004, when five assailants attacked a lecturer for his reading of the Qur'an to non-Muslims at the Carsten Niebuhr Institute at the University of Copenhagen. Another of the three artists referenced in his reasoning the case of Theo van Gogh, a Dutch actor, TV producer and film director.

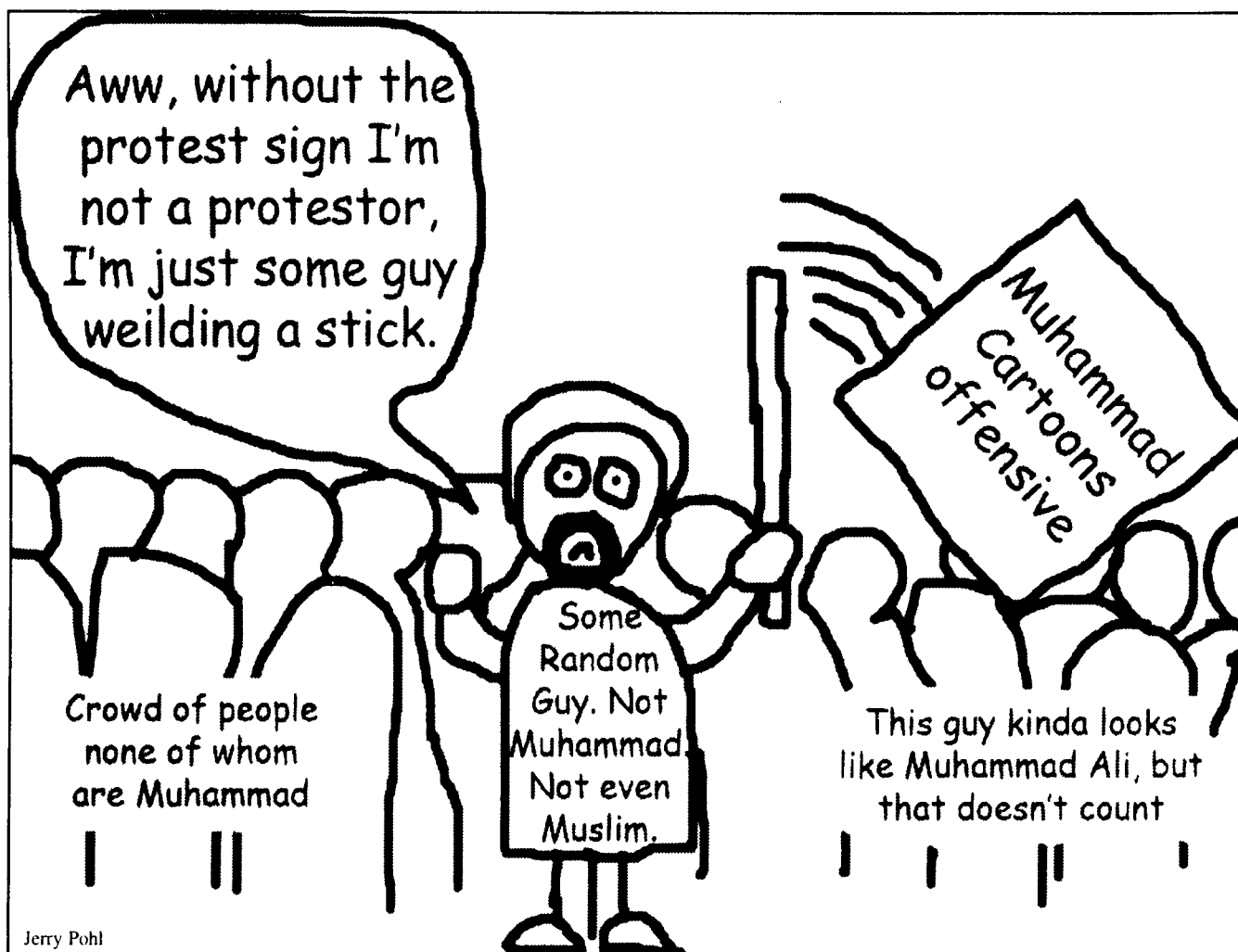
In 2004, van Gogh released a film titled "Submission," which was based on a script by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Danish politician who was born in Somalia and spent part of her life in Saudi Arabia. Van Gogh's ten-minute film's title was a translation of the word "Islam" and is critical of the treatment of women in Muslim families, including beatings and rape. In the film, passages from the Qur'an that supposedly validate these abuses are painted on the bodies of kneeling women wearing transparent veils.

The film aired on Vrijzinnig Protestantse Radio Omroep, the Liberal Protestant Radio Broadcasting Company, on Aug. 29, 2004. On Nov. 2, van Gogh was murdered by Mohammed Bouyeri, a member of suspected Dutch terrorist cell the Hofstad Network. Bouyeri shot him eight times, slit his throat and left two knives in his torso. He is currently serving a life sentence for his crime. Ali, the writer of the film, must now live under constant guard.

These violent acts played a part in the artist's decision to not illustrate Bluitgen's book, and the illustrator who did eventually do the work would only do so anonymously. Flemming Rose, cultural editor of Jyllands-Posten, another broadsheet newspaper, read the article in Politiken and saw this as a case of self-censorship that would have to be addressed.

Rose invited forty artists to draw Muhammad, twelve of them responded by sending in a cartoon. The cartoons were published in Jyllands-Posten on Sept. 30, 2005. After the controversy erupted, Rose was asked if he regretted his actions Rose said, "I think asking me that question is like asking a rape victim if she regrets wearing a short skirt Friday night at the discotheque."

The Islamic Society of Denmark demanded an apology on Oct. 9 in response to the cartoons. There was a 3,500 person demonstration Oct. 14 in Copenhagen outside the Jyllands-Posten office. By this time two of the cartoonists had received death threats. The Danish government was involved as of Oct. 19. When eleven ambassadors request-



ed to meet with Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Prime Minister of Denmark, regarding the issue. Rasmussen refused the request due to the fact that he could not interfere with freedom of the press. Since then, a myriad of organizations have criticized this decision. The notion that the government's hands are tied in this matter has also been disagreed with separately from Rasmussen's decision.

On Oct. 27 several Muslim organizations complained to Danish police that Jyllands-Posten violated section 140 of the Danish Criminal Code. This, and section 266b, basically prohibit mocking religions or people who practice them. As of Jan. 6, the Regional Public Prosecutor of Viborg has discontinued this investigation saying, "the right to freedom of speech must be exercised."

Over the next two months, several Imams, or leaders, of the Islamic Society in Denmark went to Islamic countries to rally support against the cartoons. In addition to the twelve cartoons were three images that were not involved in the debacle until then. These included one claiming Muhammad to be a pedophile, one involving an indecent act with a dog and another was an altered photo of a bearded man wearing a pig nose and ears. The photo was actually of a contestant in a Pig-Squealing contest in France. Jacques Barrot, the spokesman of the tour, Akhmad Akkari, claims that these false pictures were included to "give an insight into how hateful the atmosphere in Denmark is towards Muslims." On Dec. 7, labor strikes began in Pakistan in response to the cartoons.

On Jan. 24, 2006 Saudi Arabia's 150-member Shoura Council made a statement saying, "Those who publish such cartoons do not know the consequences; they will spread hatred and division and create animosity between communities and religions." On Jan. 26, the people of Saudi Arabia began a boycott of Danish products and recalled their Danish ambassador. On Jan. 27, Jyllands-

Posten's website was attacked. This would be followed by attacks on other Danish sites. On Jan. 29, Libya closed its embassy in Denmark, the Danish flag was burned in cities in the West Bank, and threats were issued giving Swedes, Danes and Norwegians certain amounts of time to leave the Gaza Strip. On Jan. 30, a boycott of Danish products was encouraged by the Egyptian Parliament. The European Union said that retaliatory boycotts violate world trade rules. The Mujahideen called for Danish and Norwegian targets to be hit by terrorism. Members of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades brought guns into Gaza's EU office and demanded an official apology from the EU for the cartoons, threatening to kidnap employees if these demands were not met.

Jyllands-Posten published this official apology: "In our opinion, the 12 drawings were sober. They were not intended to be offensive, nor were they at variance with Danish law, but they have indisputably offended many Muslims for which we apologize." On Jan. 31 Flemming Rose apologized "for any offense caused" on an Al-Jazeera interview. This apology was not translated into Arabic. The Danish Muslim Association accepted Jyllands-Posten's apology and promised to help improve the situation, stating also that they regretted that things have gone so far. This is the same day that Jyllands-Posten received the first of several bomb threats.

Starting Feb. 1 the cartoons were published in newspapers around the world in connection with stories related to the drama. The cartoons were first published in the United States on Feb. 2 in the New York Sun, which ran two of the cartoons. Ansar al-Islam leader Mullah Krekar called the cartoons a "declaration of war." Some of the cartoons were broadcast that night on PBS's The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. By the end of the business day Arla Foods had reported millions of dollars lost due to boycotts. The burn-

ing of embassies began.

For days, protests had mostly been peaceful, though more and more included threats and arson. The first officially death related was in Trabzon, Turkey, where Italian Catholic priest Andrea Santoro was murdered by a sixteen year old student who told police he was "influenced by cartoons lampooning the Prophet Muhammad" as was reported in The Mercury, an independent online newspaper. It would be the first of several deaths, most of them related to riots, over the next few days.

On Feb. 4, Jyllands-Posten was honored with the "Victory prize," an annual award given by Ekstra Bladet, another newspaper. They received the award for defending freedom of the press. It was soon revealed that reports of Qur'ans being burned have been exaggerated and are, in most cases, false.

On Feb. 6, Hamshahri, a newspaper in Iran, began a contest involving the submitting of Holocaust cartoons. Two days earlier Politiken broke the story that, in April 2003, Christoffer Zieler submitted three cartoons lampooning Christ to Jyllands-Posten. Sunday editor Jens Kaiser rejected the cartoons, stating in an email to Zieler, "I don't think Jyllands-Posten's readers will enjoy the drawings. As a matter of fact, I think that they will provoke an outcry. Therefore, I will not use them." Kaiser stated

recently that Zieler's cartoons were not used because they were unsolicited, while the Muhammad cartons were commissioned.

In the Qur'an there are condemnations of idolatry. Specific prohibitions of visual art are found in recorded Islamic oral traditions, called hadith, but not in the Qur'an. There are some differences within Islam, with Sunni being less tolerant of art depicting humans than Shi'a. A good resource of pictures of Muhammad is http://www.zombietime.com/mohammed_image_archive/ and includes examples from the Muslim world.

Newspapers would be better if this editorial and my news article could be run as one long article that actually educated people as to why things are the way they are, without, of course, the opinions I inserted here and at the beginning to make this an editorial; without which this would just be a lengthy factual news article. I conclude with an analogy from Dr. Joshua Shaw:

"It reminds me a little of what it can be like when you hear couples argue with each other. They will be arguing over something small, over not doing the dishes or musical tastes or a pair of shoes, but with an intensity that there is more going on. I get the sense when I hear couples fight in this way that they're focusing on little issues precisely because they're too scared to honestly discuss the bigger ones. Someone is terrified that, say, the person he loves doesn't love him back, but instead of admitting this fear he gets upset because she has shown up fifteen minutes late. They argue about whether she is always late, when really they are simultaneously arguing and not arguing about something much deeper... I have a similar feeling about this controversy over the cartoons; that they're being used, by both sides, to justify a lot rage that has little to do with the cartoons themselves. It's this self-deception that scares me most."

Submission Guidelines

The Beacon welcomes readers to share their views on this page. Letters and commentary pieces can be submitted by email to opinion@psu.edu or directly to the Beacon office, located in the Reed Building.

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries should be limited to 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run the submission.

All submissions must include the writer's year in school, major and name as The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue. All submissions are considered, but because of space limitations, some may not be published.

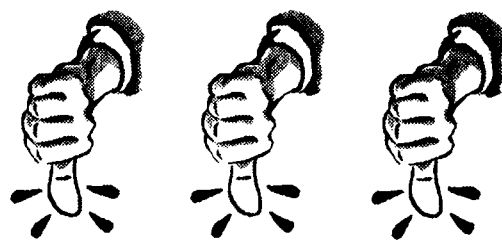
All submissions must include consent to be edited before they can be edited for publication.

Beacon Thumbs Up



- Bruno's mushroom Swiss burgers
- Kissing booths
- Chuck Norris on Best Damn Sports Show Period.
- Winter Olympics next week
- Steelers win one for the thumb
- Culture Week

Beacon Thumbs Down



- People who smoke between the doors of the Reed Building
- Smelly roommates
- Self closing wood doors in Kochel
- Not wiping pee off the seat
- Disney's Doug Funnie
- Sled "Ridding" Posters

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