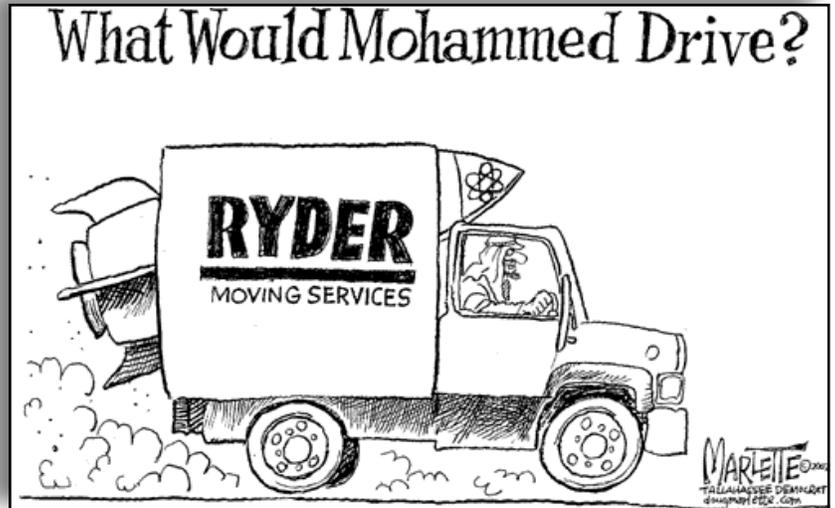


# THE VOICE OF INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM

'Political cartoonists push the limits of free speech daily.' By Doug Marlette  
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*Last year Doug Marlette drew a cartoon depicting a man dressed in Middle Eastern apparel at the wheel of a Ryder truck carrying a nuclear warhead with the caption, "What Would Mohammed Drive?." Marlette and his paper, the Tallahassee Democrat, received more than 20,000 e-mails demanding an apology for what was seen as his misrepresentation of the Prophet Mohammed. Marlette believed that an apology was not in order. The following are excerpts from the introduction to "What Would Marlette Drive?: The Scandalous Cartoons of Doug Marlette," published by Plan Nine Publishing in 2003. In them, Marlette describes how he replied to the criticism of that cartoon and talks about the importance of editorial cartoons.*



My answer to the criticism was published in the Tallahassee Democrat (and reprinted around the country) under the headline "With All Due Respect, an Apology Is Not in Order." ... In my 30-year career I have regularly drawn cartoons that offend religious fundamentalists and true believers of every stripe, a fact that I tend to list in the "Accomplishments" column of my resumé. I have outraged Christians by skewering Jerry Falwell, Roman Catholics by needling the Pope, and Jews by criticizing Israel. Those who rise up against the expression of ideas are strikingly similar. No one is less tolerant than those demanding tolerance. Despite differences of culture and creed, they all seem to share the egocentric notion that there is only one way of looking at things, their way, and that others have no right to see things differently. What I have learned from years of this is one of the great lessons of all the world's religions: We are all One in our humanness. ...

And then I gave my Journalism 101 lecture on the First Amendment, explaining why an apology

was not in order: In this country we do not apologize for our opinions. Free speech is the linchpin of our republic. All other freedoms flow from it. After all, we don't need a First Amendment to allow us to run boring, inoffensive cartoons. We don't need constitutional protection to make money from advertising. We don't need constitutional protection to tell readers exactly what they want to hear. We need constitutional protection for our right to express unpopular views. If we can't discuss the great issues of the day in the pages of our newspapers, fearlessly and without apology, where can we discuss them? In the streets with guns? In cafés with detonator vests and strapped-on bombs? ...

Political cartoonists push the limits of free speech daily. They were once the embodiment of journalism's independent voice, the gadfly spirit, the pride and point men of a vigorous free press. Today they are as endangered a species as bald eagles. The professional troublemaker has become a luxury that offends the bottom-line

sensibilities of corporate journalism. Twenty years ago, there were 200 of us working on daily newspapers. Now there are only 90. Herblock is dead. Jeff MacNelly is dead. And most of the rest of us might as well be. Just as resumé hounds have replaced news hounds in today's newsrooms, ambition has replaced talent at the drawing boards. Passion has yielded to careerism, Thomas Nast to Eddie Haskell. As a result, quality is down, the currency devalued. With the retirement of Paul Conrad at the Los Angeles Times, a rolling blackout from California has engulfed the country, dimming the pilot lights on many American editorial pages. Most editorial cartoons now look as bland as B-roll and as impenetrable as a 1040 form. Even the controversies aroused by editorial cartoons these days are often as much a result of the ineptness of the artist as of the substance of the opinion. ...

Why should we care about the obsolescence of the editorial cartoonist? Because cartoons can't say "on the other hand," because they strain reason and logic, because they are hard to defend, they are the acid test of the First Amendment, and that is why they must be preserved. ...

What would Marlette drive? The absolute, self-evident, unalienable American way that we as a young nation discovered and modeled and road-tested for the entire world: the freedom to be ourselves, to speak the truth as we see it, and to drive it home.

