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‘Charlie Hebdo’ Massacre Prompts New Criticism of 2009 Episode at Yale

By Peter Schmidt

Last week’s terrorist attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, the French satirical newspaper that had published images of the Muslim prophet Muhammad, is prompting renewed criticism of Yale University Press’s [controversial decision](#) to redact similar cartoons from a scholarly book published in 2009.

That book, *The Cartoons That Shook the World*, focused on a global crisis that had erupted four years earlier over the publication of 12 caricatures of Muhammad by a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*. The Yale press cited fears of inciting violence in removing the cartoons and all other illustrations, including recent and historical images of the Muslim prophet, from the book before publishing it.

The decision was widely criticized by the [American Association of University Professors](#) and other academic and free-speech [advocacy groups](#), several of which [cited it](#) as part of a troubling trend in which colleges were surrendering the free exchange of ideas in response to threats.

In some respects, last week’s attacks in France, in which Islamist gunmen killed 12 people at *Charlie Hebdo*’s offices and five other people elsewhere, appeared to confirm that Yale University Press’s fears might have had some basis. But in [an article](#) published on Tuesday in the *Yale Daily News*, a student newspaper, and in op-eds printed elsewhere, people close to the Yale press’s decision and other scholars have cited the killings in France as reason to

argue that the university press should have included cartoons in the book to take a stand in support of academic freedom and free speech.

Among those who have taken such a position is Fareed R. Zakaria, the pundit and CNN host who, back then, in his former capacity as a Yale trustee, issued a statement saying [he had advised](#) the press not to publish the cartoons. On Wednesday he stood by a [December column](#) in *The Washington Post* in which he expressed regret for his 2009 stand, arguing, "The right response then and now must be to affirm freedom of expression."

In an email, Mr. Zakaria, a 1986 Yale graduate, added, however, that "it's a very difficult decision for any institution that has to worry about the dangers to its people," and that he has "enormous respect and sympathy" for those making such calls. Although his recent *Washington Post* column described the decision as "one I would not have made" and said he had agreed to defend the decision out of concern for Yale and respect for administrators there, the statement that he issued at the time said he was relieved that the Yale press had heeded his counsel not to publish the cartoons.

'Imagined' Danger

John E. Donatich, who was director of the Yale press at the time and remains in that position, did not return calls on Wednesday seeking comment. Thomas Conroy, a Yale spokesman, said the university has "not had cause since 2009 to revisit the issue of Professor Klausen's book" and the Yale press "does not have any contractual obligation to print a paperback version of the book," which is available digitally.

The book's author, Jytte Klausen, a professor of politics at Brandeis University, has revisited the episode and condemned the Yale press's decision in a *Yale Daily News* interview and in a January 7 [Time magazine op-ed](#) in which she argued that the Yale press had

censored her book in response to "imagined" danger. "There were no known threats against the press or against myself, at the time, and there never have been any," her *Time* article argued.

Jonathan Brent, who was Yale University Press's editorial director and the book's commissioning editor, opposed redacting the cartoons at the time. He said on Wednesday, "The lesson it taught by caving in cannot be undone or papered over by all the volumes" in Yale's main library.

"If the major educational institutions of the Western world cannot summon the courage to defend freedom of speech, who will?" asked Mr. Brent, who now is executive director of the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, in New York. He said he suspected the Yale press had acted to protect its corporate interests rather than in response to any real danger.

The Danish newspaper's 2005 publication of the Muhammad cartoons led to protests around the world and to plots of violence against the newspaper and its employees.

Brenna McLaughlin, a spokeswoman for the Association of American University Presses, said this week that her organization knew of no other university presses that had grappled with whether to publish images of Muhammad after the Yale controversy.

But Paul M. Sniderman, a professor of political science at Stanford University, said he and his three Danish co-authors had made a conscious decision to leave the cartoons out of their 2014 book on Danes' response to the *Jyllands-Posten* episode, which they titled *Paradoxes of Liberal Democracy: Islam, Western Europe, and the Danish Cartoon Crisis* (Princeton University Press).

Mr. Sniderman said his co-authors, all professors at Aarhus University, in the same city as the newspaper, each "feared for the safety of their family," especially given that "they live right at

ground zero." He added, however, that he and his co-authors had also decided that the cartoons were not needed to illustrate the social-science research that was the book's basis. "The effect of including of cartoons," he said, "would be to make their inclusion the focal point."

Peter Schmidt writes about affirmative action, academic labor, and issues related to academic freedom. Contact him at peter.schmidt@chronicle.com.

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prof_twocents · 7 days ago

The shift away from freedom of expression towards self-censorship just highlights one of the reasons why traditional academic publishing via academic presses as gatekeepers is deservedly dying. I look forward with great eagerness to whatever will take its place. Whatever it might be, it is hard to imagine much worse than the current system.

16 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›

William Hamilton → **prof_twocents** · 3 hours ago

First let me say that if you've ever taken a course on First Amendment Freedoms you would know this right is not absolute and they're is ample course material for a while semester!

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›

Tomasso · 6 days ago

I do think that those of us who care about civilization and the quality of relationships we cultivate in the human community would do well to speak out in defense of the value of responsible free speech. No need to censor, but no need either to celebrate or be in solidarity with purveyors of images and speech that have clear hateful intentions. Je ne suis pas Charlie.

6 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›

Cleo2 → **Tomasso** · 6 days ago

Alas, is it not all in one's perception of "hateful intentions?" Is there not an unresolvable conflict, for example, in an evangelical Christian's offense at being told he is a moronic, hate-filled bigot simply because of his faith vs. a gay student's offense at being thought to be engaging in sinful acts, although he as a human being is loved, which is the bulwark of Christian thought? Who is going to determine which "hate" should be more or less supported or castigated by any given institution?

30 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›

inteinte → **Cleo2** · 6 days ago

Well said!

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

vicky warshawski → Tomasso · 6 days ago

not so clear. CH is anti-racist and pro-immigration. the US media shows you a very selective bunch of covers which for the most part, it doesn't understand very well (e.g. the Boko Haram/welfare cover)

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

ronj1955 · 6 days ago

The defense of free speech is an illusion unless it is universally applied. The fact is--it isn't. Israel kills journalists, the US targets journalists and puts prevents protesters from protesting, Moscow locks them up...ad infinitum. What happen in Paris was terrible. However, its gruesomeness lies in the means of the execution, not in the fact of it.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

jayaich · 6 days ago

Being afraid of what others might do is not a sufficient reason to censor academic work.

14 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

William Hamilton → jayaich · 3 hours ago

Restraint, respect and a few other words come to mind when I think of an educated person, i.e., academia! We, the learned, should know better!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

jayaich → William Hamilton · 3 hours ago

Restraint? Doesn't that mean reacting reasonably when *feeling* slighted?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

I just wanna ask a question to all the "defenders of Freedom Of Expression". Since when did making cartoons which offend more than a billion people on the globe count as a victory? And why is denying the Holocaust a crime in France punishable by imprisonment? Wait that's against Jews and we don't wanna hurt their feelings, but its perfectly legitimate to offend a billion Muslims and not expect a small section of them to rise and attack the Charlie Hebdo.

<https://firstlook.org/theinter...>

Where are you now, academicians and defenders of "freedom of expression"? Making fun of Islam's Prophet and offending Muslims is okay but offending Jews ain't? Why the hypocrisy?

I am NOT Charlie, which mocked me. I am Ahmed, the Muslim who died defending Charlie's right to ridiculing my faith.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

inteinte → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

This is why all anti-hate crime laws are wrong.

16 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → inteinte · 6 days ago

From what I see it, Charlie Hebdo itself fired an editor for making

tun of Jews! Is this the ideal all the supporters of Charlie Hebdo stand up for?

<http://anonhq.com/charlie-hebd...>

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Cleo2 → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

Popular growing fable but he was fired for insubordination.

8 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → Cleo2 · 6 days ago

A fable? Really now?

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/new...>

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Cleo2 → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

He was asked to apologize, and responded he would prefer to cut off his testicles. That is insubordination.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → Cleo2 · 6 days ago

So ironic, apparently making a cartoon with tones of anti-Semitism warrants an apology and the cartoonist asked to be fired by intellectuals including Bernard Henry-Levy, but making a caricature ridiculing a revered religious figure by billions throughout the globe isn't. I don't know about you but I see hypocrisy shining here. I rest my case.

<http://anonhq.com/charlie-hebd...>

Just for the record, the above link is from the world famous Anonymous.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Cleo2 → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

I also see some hypocrisy. I agree. But the notion that people deserve, and might expect, to be murdered for a cartoonish depiction is not acceptable and those who would do so should not be considered respectable members of our civilization.

16 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → Cleo2 · 6 days ago

If you incite others to violence, then unfortunately, this will be the outcome. Let's not forget my original point. I am NOT charlie, which ridiculed my faith, I am Ahmed, the guard who died defending charlies right to mock me. Wish charlie didn't have double standards either.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

jayaich → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 3 hours ago

Nice threat. Why even bother arguing if your response is violence. May peace be upon you.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

inteinte → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

True or not, the standard should be consistency. Either make fun of everyone, or no one. The NYT specifically stated they would not fun photos of the offensive cartoons out of sensitivity to Muslims, but they've certainly not followed this standard in the past regarding Christians.

10 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

zincwarrior → inteinte · 6 days ago

True that.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → inteinte · 6 days ago

All Prophets are sacrosanct to us, which Includes Jesus (Peace Be Upon Him) and Moses (Peace Be Upon Him). The media should realize that just like anti semtism is a crime, then offending the religious sensitivities of a particular community is not freedom of speech. its the exact opposite. Somewhere along the line, even the media does self-censorship, even when it deletes abusive words or hate speech.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

inteinte → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

Any member of the media may choose to censor themselves as they wish, but I personally will brook no law requiring it, & attempting to convince me otherwise is a waste of time.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

vicky warshawski → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

offending Jews isn't a crime. I think you're a bit confused.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

jmb653 → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

Except for the Buddhas of Bamiyan...

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

smith22 → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

I believe the Charlie Hebdo supporters are standing up for the right to free expression without fear of being murdered by bloodthirsty zealots. But do go on about the JEWS. It's very illustrative.

13 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

JustAnotherTechWriter → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

Screw your faith. Screw the Jews, the Muslims, and the Christians. Your faith is not some sacrosanct thing which is above all criticism. You have a right to your own beliefs, but you DO NOT have the right to not be offended by mine. So suck it up, buttercup.

13 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → JustAnotherTechWriter · 6 days ago

I might. But don't cry if some random bizzaro petrol bombs people like Chalie Hebdo or kills them. I won't be responsible for

them. There's a thing called cultural sensitivity. Ever heard of that?

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Cleo2 → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

You could be arrested in France today for those words.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → Cleo2 · 6 days ago

Well, there goes my freedom of expression, doesn't it?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

JustAnotherTechWriter → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

What Islamic cultural sensitivity may look like..



10 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → JustAnotherTechWriter · 6 days ago

And we saw just a tiny glimpse of the "Western" cultural sensitivity when people tried to justify "advanced interrogation techniques" aka torture. And let's not forget those who chanted anti Islam slogans in Germany, of course, we call those people justified in their fears (and not racist) but protesting Muslims expressing their anger are terrorists.

If the West had some respect and not invaded Iraq (for oil), or Afghanistan (for strategic purposes), and had learnt to make laws which protected Muslim's sentiments as they do Jews, then we wouldn't see these slogans today. Frankly, these are the ultra conservative Muslims which flourish cause of the West's hegemony and arrogance.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

akeller → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

I call these people mohareb.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

vicky warshawski → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

no, "we" do not call those German mobs "justified in their fears," we call them morons and racists.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

inteinte → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

My cultural & religious values are offended all the time, but there's also this thing called self control. Ever heard of that?

You are correct that if some "bizzaro" throws a bomb, it won't be your fault, but it won't be the fault of whoever offended him/her either. It will be the bizzaro's fault.

12 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → [inteinte](#) · 6 days ago

Ironic that we are asked to do "self-control" when the West in itself can't stand any piece of anti semitic literature, and uses double standards which I showed itself with Charlie Hebdo.

You cannot offend more than a billion people's revered religious figure, and then expect them to have "self control". If the West is unaware of the concept of "cultural sensitivity" then it should not expect others to have self control.

If denying the Holocaust can become a crime, so can offending Islam's (or for the matter any monotheistic religion's) Prophet.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

inteinte → [Jaleed Ahmed Gilani](#) · 5 days ago

Denying the Holocaust should not be a crime. And "The West" is not monolithic in it's attitude regarding free speech - I believe the US values free speech more than any European country (I'm unaware of any jurisdiction in the US where holocaust denial is a crime)..

"The West" is actually hyper-aware of the concept of "cultural sensitivity" (it's called political correctness).

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world & it's very sensitive to other religious & cultural beliefs. I believe the same can be said of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey. But tell me, is this true of many other majority Muslim countries? The last time I checked, Christians all over the Middle East were being killed & churches were being burned - Christian communities which had been in these countries for almost a couple of thousand years. Why does this concept of "cultural sensitivity" only work one way in these countries?

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

jayaich → [Jaleed Ahmed Gilani](#) · 3 hours ago

did you really just say this: "But don't cry if some random bizzaro petrol bombs people like Chalie Hebdo or kills them."? May peace be upon you.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

zincwarrior → [JustAnotherTechWriter](#) · 6 days ago

And suck it up when you're told you're going to hell you narcissistic sinner. It goes both ways.

And thats how freedom of speech should work.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

vicky warshawski → [Jaleed Ahmed Gilani](#) · 6 days ago

If a bunch of Jews had stormed Charlie Hebdo and gunned down their

start in the name of their God, rest assured condemnation would have followed.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jaleed Ahmed Gilani → vicky warshawski · 6 days ago

I agree that these killers should be condemned, but to be honest, the dead editors at charlie hebdo were no angels either whom if you don't support then you're against free speech. The west should realise this and not do the "You're with us or against us" mantra all the time.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

vicky warshawski → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 6 days ago

Eh, I'm no angel myself. Still, shouldn't be shot for it, right? It's not like there's a sliding scale for murder.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

AssociateProfessor → Jaleed Ahmed Gilani · 5 days ago

Making a joke about Mohammed is mocking a religious belief or an ideology.

Making a Holocaust joke is mocking the mechanized death of millions.

No one sane makes a joke like this: "Look at those Yazidis, man, they die so amusingly when they're raped to death by ISIS! HA HA HA" but almost every single holocaust-denying joke does exactly the same thing, only replacing Yazidi with Jew, and ISIS with gas chamber.

On the other hand, any being who has been presented as "the perfect person" not only deserves to be be mocked, but -SHOULD- be mocked. Mohammed was a human. He failed, he succeeded, he made mistakes and did some pretty vile things. Mohammed is not perfect, and an ideology which promotes a human as perfect (or godly) needs to take the piss.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

inteinte · 6 days ago

All of academia must stop & reflect on the fact that Charlie Hebdo would never have been allowed to exist as a campus-related publication. To loudly proclaim solidarity w/ Charlie at this point is to deny the widespread suppression of opinion speech on campuses for quite some time now - for academia, it has been "je ne suis pas Charlie".

22 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Christopher Gerstle → inteinte · 6 days ago

It's sad but true.

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Tomasso → Christopher Gerstle · 6 days ago

I want to make clear first that I do have solidarity with the victims of the Paris violence, including the staff at Charlie. My concern is with what it means to be a grown up in a world rife with violent emotion. Someone here mentioned a good question about who gets to decide what is offensive. I offer an example. Imagine the discussions that would be circulating here in the Chronicle if a publication like the Onion decided to run a cartoon of Martin Luther King engaging in lewd sex acts. Would anyone deny a hateful insult to the memory of one of the spiritual heroes our

material insult to the memory of one of the spiritual heroes our nation remembers as a beacon to all the world? Why was this even remotely okay as treatment for the Prophet. Addressing another concerned writer here, I am in full agreement with you that Charlie's attacks on Jews and Christians were also the kinds of material that only serve to create division and tear down civil society. My call is not for censorship but for more adults to use this as a moment to speak up for true human values. We need that strong moral voice to ring through the Academy and break through the bland walls of meaningless "tolerance".

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Cleo2 → Tomasso · 6 days ago

Hear, hear. I echo your call for a return to respect for morality in all senses of the word, other than "relative."

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Tomasso → Cleo2 · 6 days ago

Thank you.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Guest → Cleo2 · 6 days ago

except for staying sober at fraternity parties, I seem to recall.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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