

# Cartoons of Mass Destruction

Wednesday, February 08 2006 @ 10:30 AM MST

Contributed by: harrisp

by Paul Richard Harris

What on earth could possibly be wrong with those Muslims? Are they unable to appreciate humour? Sure, the cartoons published in Europe that show the Prophet Muhammad unfavourably are cheeky, rude, and maybe even insulting. But jokes are often made at the expense of religious figures without provoking the reaction we have seen from Muslims across the world. It's hard to imagine that devout Christians, for instance, would not have been offended (numerous times) by Monty Python routines; but I don't recall priests and acolytes hitting the streets to call for the death of Great Britain.

But while the present reaction to the cartoons is astonishing to some, and expected by others, these were just jokes, right?

No, they weren't just jokes.

Leaving aside whether Muslims are stiff-necked and unable to appreciate a joke, at least one at their own expense, these cartoons were not published to be funny. Nor were they published, as claimed by the chief editor of Denmark's *Jyllands-Posten*, to "examine whether people would succumb to self-censorship, as we have seen in other cases when it comes to Muslim issues." They were published to inflame, to denigrate, to anger, to humiliate.

It has been argued that Muslims need to lighten up a bit and stop taking themselves so seriously. That may or may not be valid; but the fact remains the newspapers who published these cartoons knew exactly what they were doing and the reaction they could expect. Regardless of whether the Muslims are stiff-necked, publishing these cartoons was no different than yelling 'Fire!' in a crowded theatre. They might have underestimated the fury with which Muslims would respond, but they knew they would provoke anger. They did so with careful, and malicious, intent

This is NOT an issue of 'freedom of the press'. Of course the newspapers had the 'right' to publish the cartoons; that's what freedom of the press is all about. But while that right should not be curtailed, understanding the ramifications of carrying these particular cartoons should have been evident. Publishing them was just plain stupid.

There is no question that the reaction of the Muslims is extreme and not justifiable. But it is understandable. These cartoons were published in Europe, where Muslims are a marginalized group.

They were published by a newspaper well-known as a right-wing anti-immigrant journal, and there can be little doubt that the editors of *Jyllands-Posten* intended to be hurtful. Muslims know this. And they know their brethren living in Europe are ghettoized and oppressed and they could not have failed to see this as a provocation against an oppressed people. *Jyllands-Posten* is linked to the Danish People's Party which opposes a multi-cultural approach to Denmark's growing immigrant population and is on record as stating it is impossible to assimilate Muslims into Danish society. Muslims know that, too.

The publication of those cartoons was not an exercise in freedom of the press; it was a coldly calculated step that had no intent other than to cause harm. *Jyllands-Posten*, and all those who have subsequently carried the cartoons, deliberately set out to create a problem, to inflame an already volatile situation, to set fire to a cat's tail for the sheer pleasure of watching it suffer. The editors of the world who say otherwise are lying. They would never think to publish pictures or cartoons of a woman being gang-raped, or of someone sodomizing a young child – they would understand that societal norms would be grossly offended by such things and they would not argue about 'freedom of the press'. In the same way, they knew that a large part of their society would be grossly offended by these cartoons and chose to publish anyway, for the sheer thrill of causing that offence. Newspaper editors are not generally stupid people so they surely would have understood the reaction they were likely to see; their decisions to publish can only be seen as an intentional move to provoke exactly that reaction.

There are those who are claiming the reaction of the Muslims is rooted in religious fundamentalism – and some of it surely is. But most of the reaction arises from contemporary conditions of imperialist oppression. Even *Newsday*, publishing in the United States, recognizes that, "The deep offence many Muslims have taken to the cartoons is about present-day politics as much as theology."

This situation plays into the hands of the world's oppressors. When black Americans took to the streets in riotous numbers during the 1960s, commentators acknowledged the years of pent-up frustration over societal marginalization. Inwardly, though, most of the smarmy journalists and politicians of the day knew that the riots only occurred because these people were black; civilized white folk would never have acted that way. And blacks have never been forgiven for their violent response to oppression.

Today, in many places, Muslims are the blacks, they are the ghettoized Jews, the constricted and restricted Sikhs, the oppressed indigenous people of many lands. And they are reacting as should be expected. Someone has taken a spark and applied it, with deliberate forethought, to extremely dry tinder. The resulting fire should surprise no one.

The current turmoil will eventually die out. But the resentment will not. Muslims will continue to believe they are oppressed in many places, that they are hated in many places, that they are convenient scapegoats. And they will be right.

There is no justification for the carnage the Muslim people have unleashed on the world ... but only a damn fool would fail to understand it.

*Thanks to Peter Simonsen for suggesting this article and its title.*

[1 comments](#)

---

<http://www.vivelecanada.ca/article.php?story=20060208093913379>