



Lessons learned

by Paul Harris

Early in 2003 I wrote an article that appeared on YellowTimes.org that would surely have left readers with the impression that the ideas espoused were entirely my own. While I stand by every word in the article, I do have to confess that some of the words were not mine and that I failed to acknowledge such in the article. I did develop the idea independent from other sources but I was certainly not the first person to have considered the issue the way I did.

While I was in the midst of preparing my article, a friend forwarded to me a draft of an essay he had located on the Internet which was on the same topic. It was exactly what I was looking for. Unfortunately, the draft contained the name of the author but no other information. Although it was obviously not complete, it was a good outline of what would eventually become the final essay and so it was very easy for me to see where the author was going with it. I adapted the text I had already written to the style of this other essay, because it was very much superior to what I had accomplished so far with my own article.

In crafting my article, I searched a variety of sources but in the end, there were some words that were simply copied, or only modestly altered, from the other writer's work. That, in itself, is a time-honoured method of writing; the problem arose because I was so sloppy that I failed to acknowledge the other writer's work. I wish I could tell you that I had included some of his words intending to go back and rewrite them into something original; or that I meant to give proper attribution to his words. In fact, though, I simply failed to even think about it.

This is wrong, it is unfair, it is not the way I work. I certainly cannot excuse my carelessness but this can serve as a warning to me and to others about the value of individual work and giving credit where it is due.

Journalists are often unable to properly research and dig for stories so they are increasingly reliant on the public relations folks to do it for them; reporters rewrite corporate and government press releases rather than do their own independent research. In this case, I had written original material based on reading I had done but I borrowed liberally from someone else's work without attribution. I have never done this before (read others of my articles and you will find quotes and attributions) and I will certainly never do it again.

The article found on the Internet was very long, even longer in its completed form, and in my view was likely to be above the heads of many readers (it was certainly beyond my understanding the first time I read it). So I endeavored to take the work I had already completed and mix it with portions of the other author's work and to make it simpler to understand, sort of an 'economics for dummies' (oh no, that's probably a copyright phrase!). The original article was far too long for YellowTimes and I sought to make it simple enough for

me to understand it which should, in turn, make it more clear for most readers. What had been an incomplete article at twenty pages became part of my completed piece at three pages.

Once I finally saw the completed work of the other author, complete with contact information, I wrote to him immediately. It was some while, however, before we finally connected but in the end, we made peace with each other and he very graciously forgave my oversight. If you are curious about the article to which I am referring, please see my 'America's War with Europe' at <http://www.YellowTimes.org/articles.php?sid=1083> which now includes the appropriate attribution. I would also strenuously urge that you search out William Clark's original article as it is much more comprehensive than mine and contains an excellent set of footnote references which can lead you to other works on the same topic. Try this link: <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/RRIraqWar.html>

No one at YellowTimes.org would have been aware of my lapse in judgment; no one is to blame for this situation other than me. And finally, while I have certainly done so privately, I wish to make a clear and unequivocal apology to Mr. Clark for my error and for any discomfiture it may have given him.

Mea culpa.