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Prophet cartoon on door prompts action

By **Aaron Brown**

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A Hoover House student faces possible disciplinary action after drawing a cartoon of the Muslim prophet Muhammad on a suite door.

A student in Hoover House faces possible disciplinary action from the University after posting a cartoon depicting the Muslim prophet Muhammad on a dormitory door. The incident, which occurred early last week, follows the recent expulsion of two students from Hitchcock House after one wrote racist and anti-Semitic remarks on the other's whiteboard.

The drawing in Hoover featured a crudely sketched figure accompanied by the caption "Mc Mohammed, Mo' Problems," in reference to the recent worldwide protests of the Muhammad cartoons. It was drawn on a sheet of paper and posted on the outside door of the student's suite facing the dormitory hallway.

The student who drew the cartoon did not wish to be named and declined to discuss the incident with the Maroon, citing the ongoing investigation by the Housing Office.

Those familiar with the situation said a complaint was raised shortly after the illustration went up. According to a first-year Hoover resident who also declined to be named, a neighbor left a written objection on the suite door, and Andrea Gates, Hoover Resident Head, was notified of the drawing. The student who drew the cartoon took it down after receiving the complaint and issued a written apology to the offended resident at Gates's request.

While dealing with the situation internally, Gates also referred the incident to the Housing Office

Katie Callow-Wright, the director of Undergraduate Student Housing at the University, refused to discuss the drawing, explaining that housing officials “do not comment about individual student matters.”

The cartoonist was told that the matter had been discussed, but the student has yet to hear anything from housing, according to the first-year Hoover resident. However, a serious punishment is not out of the question. The student was “told there’s a possibility he’ll get kicked out of housing,” the first-year resident added.

The first-year resident said he thought that such a punishment would be “harsh,” describing the drawing as an attempt to “kind of lighten up the mood a little bit.”

Alex Akhter, a second-year Hoover resident, agreed. “It almost seems like...we’re losing our sense of humor,” he said. “I’m...disturbed by what I see as growing phenomenon of thought-policing on this campus.”

The Student Manual of University Policies and Regulations addresses this type of incident. It states that the University does “not attempt to shield people from ideas that they may find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even offensive. Nor, as a general rule, does the University intervene to enforce social standards of civility.”

Yet some students feel that this incident goes beyond freedom of expression.

Hasan Ali, a fourth-year in the College and president of the Muslim Students’ Association, notes the difference between freedom of speech and freedom from responsibility. He compared the cartoon to the drawing of a swastika, noting that such an image “is free speech but is still wrong.”

Ali characterized the situation as an example of ignorance but not “malicious ignorance.” He said the best solution is not punishment but education, aimed at promoting more tolerance of different cultures.

“People don’t realize what is important to Muslims,” he said. “To degrade [Muhammad] in any manner is deeply offensive to people of the religion.”

While he described the U of C as “very, very open and comfortable,” he added he sees some bias against Islam on campus. “Acts against Muslims go very underreported,” he said.

The first-year Hoover resident familiar with the incident revealed that the objection to the drawing was raised by a Muslim resident. However, this was the only complaint about the illustration, and the neighbor harbors no “intensely harsh” feelings toward the cartoonist, the first-year said.

In fact, the incident has attracted little attention on campus. Relatively few students were aware of what occurred, as the University and Hoover House have said nothing publicly.

The first-year student believes this minimal response—as opposed to the statement released by Vice President and Dean of Students in the University Steve Klass to the Maroon after the Hitchcock incident—is appropriate: “If he’s creating an environment which...intentionally hurt other people, that’s one thing. But he did this once, and he apologized for it.”

An apology seemed to be enough for Ali as well. “You don’t fight fire with fire.” he said. “You fight it with understanding.”

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