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More Than Cartoons

Local reaction to international controversy remains unified

Article by:

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Editor's note: The following 12 cartoons ran in a Danish newspaper in Sept. 2005 and since then have sparked riots worldwide. The Northern Star presents them here on the basis of their news value.

As the Muslim cartoon riots continue to escalate around the world, the Muslim-American community in the area is not without response.

"Our initial reaction was to condemn the publication of the cartoons and condemn the violent reactions in the Muslim world," said Ahmed Rehab, director of communication for the Chicago Chapter of Council on American-Islamic Relations.

In Sept. 2005, a Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, printed a series of cartoons satirizing the prophet Muhammad. In response, Muslims around the world demonstrated anger in protests and deadly riots. The Danish newspaper and government defended the right to print the cartoons on the grounds of free speech, while apologizing for the uproar they caused. Other European newspapers reprinted the cartoons to defend free speech, contributing to the outrage.

Local reaction

Atique Ahmed, adviser for the Muslim Student Association and mechanical engineer for NIU, is well aware of conflict between Muslims and the western world.

"Both sides are using the freedom of expression rights; yet not reaching any accommodation," he said. "Having expressed their anger, the Muslims across the world should calm down."

Senior marketing major Hiba Abdullah also had strong reactions to the conflict.

"I understand that there is freedom of press, however, I think it is very daring to be so disrespectful toward a faith [1.6 billion] follow," Abdullah said.

Disrespect

Mahvish Hussain, women's representative of the Muslim Student Association, recognizes the general feeling of disrespect the Muslim world feels from the press. However, it's questionable as to whether this disrespect is worthy of the violence, she said.

"[The riots] are understandable to some extent, however, I wholeheartedly condemn the destructive and unruly elements within those who attempted to peacefully demonstrate as they are contrary to the teachings of the Prophet of Islam," she said.

Why the intensity?

Valerie Garver, an associate professor of history at NIU, sheds some light on the background of these violent reactions.

"Islam forbids the figural representation of Muhammad, whom Muslims consider to be the last and greatest of the prophets of God. Muslims believe that any representation of Muhammad is sacrilegious, so to depict the Prophet with a bomb, for example, adds injury to insult in the eyes of many Muslims."



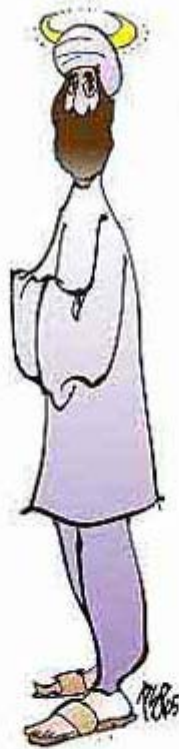
This negative representation is understood by people of other faiths as well. Some Christians relate Muhammad to Jesus. Fr. Godwin Asuquo, a priest at the Newman Catholic Student Center, recognizes this connection.

"To be offended if Christ is presented in a negative light is justifiable, but violence is not justifiable," he said. "Christianity teaches us to forgive, not to create violence."

Justin Blass, an officer in Christian Campus Crusade Ministry, also understands firsthand the feeling of having something he believes in criticized.

"Jesus being attacked is something that I expect," he said. "It's hard because when you believe in something, emotion gets involved. I can understand the emotional response to criticism, but as it comes, I try to take a step back and separate emotion from the truth."

Despite the motives behind the violent reactions, much of the Muslim-American community believes the rioting should cease. Instead of violence, Rehab said, CAIR believes the Muslim community should promote dialogue.



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