

May Allah Reward the Fair Journalists

Rattling the Cage: Pity Rick didn't rag the Muslims

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Four recent scandals involving public figures accused of running down minorities show that any offensive commentary on followers of Islam incurs no real consequences.

In America, you can't rag the Jews publicly and you can't rag the blacks publicly. It's taboo – you lose your job, you have to quit the campaign if you say bad things about Jews or blacks – even if what you say is, you know, true.

After Jews and blacks come the Latinos, Asians, Catholics and all the other ethnic and religious minorities – none of them have the victim status that blacks and Jews enjoy, they're not as controversial, so nobody in America is much inclined to slag them off anyway. (Latino illegal immigrants, however, are a different story, and you can put them down as much as you want so long as you specify that you're talking about "illegal immigrants," or at least "immigrants," and not Latinos in general.)

With one exception, political correctness protects every ethnic and religious minority in America from public bad-mouthing, and that one exception is Muslims. In America, you can say anything you want as publicly as you want against Muslims, against Islam, against the Koran, and the only thing mainstream America might do is elect you. You will have trouble in very narrow, left-liberal, Ivy League circles, but that's all. Everywhere else in the USA, Muslims are fair game. (All Arabs count as Muslims, of course, even if they're Christian).

THIS IS the deal, and it can be seen in four recent American scandals involving public figures accused of running down Jews, blacks or Muslims. The most recent was CNN's Rick Sanchez, who said Jews have great power in the American media and are far from being an oppressed minority anymore (which is true).

Then there was legendary White House correspondent Helen Thomas, who said Israeli Jews should go back to Germany, Poland or the US (which is insulting, but if an American said Palestinians should go live in one of the 22 Arab countries, nobody would mind).

Also, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who slaps people around on radio, told a black caller that blacks shouldn't complain about white people saying "nigger" – she repeated the term over and over – when black rappers and comics use it all the time (which is also true).

Finally, Martin Peretz, editor-in-chief and co-owner of *The New Republic*, wrote in opposition to the "Ground Zero mosque" that "Muslim life is cheap, most notably to Muslims."

He noted "the routine and random bloodshed that defines the brotherhood [of

Muslims],” and expressed impatience at having to “pretend that they are worthy of the privileges of the First Amendment...”

After being called out by a liberal *New York Times* columnist, Peretz, who has been coming down on Muslims like this for decades, apologized for the First Amendment remark, but defended his point about Muslim murderousness as “a statement of fact, not value.”

There’s an element of truth in what he writes, but it’s so exaggerated and generalized that it ends up being plain bigotry. There’s also an element of truth in the bigoted statement, “Muslim life is cheap, most notably to Jews,” but could Peretz or any other prominent American have written that and gotten away with it? Of course not. There’s a large element of truth in the insulting statement, “American Jews for Israel are chickenhawks,” but can you write that in the mainstream American media? No you can’t.

SO WHAT happened in the end to our four scandal-machers? Sanchez was fired by CNN, Thomas retired under extreme pressure, Schlessinger lost affiliates and sponsors and is going off the air at year’s end. As for Peretz, he got heckled at Harvard and slammed by some liberal columnists, but he still has his job, is still free to write whatever he wants in *The New Republic*.

Obviously, it’s harder to get rid of a guy when he’s the co-owner of the company, but if Peretz had truly created a scandal for *The New Republic*, he’d be gone – the point is that he didn’t. He broke no taboo. He made himself more unpopular than he already was among a segment of East Coast liberals, but so what? Whoever lost a job in America for slagging off Muslims?

And it’s not because Peretz is Jewish – Schlessinger is Jewish, too. It’s because his target is the one ethnic/religious minority that Americans are free to abuse. Any Muslim who can’t prove that he’s a registered Republican who’s joined the Tea Party is an “Islamist,” an alien subversive. Newt Gingrich, who’s compared the Muslims who want to build the Ground Zero mosque to Nazis, is running for president on this theme. “America is experiencing an Islamist cultural-political offensive designed to undermine and destroy our civilization,” he says, and he has a very good shot at getting elected.

In America, you cannot extract violent, bigoted statements out of Jewish or Christian holy books and say, “You see – Judaism/Christianity is a religion of hate!”

If you do that in mainstream America, you will be shunned. But if you cherry-pick from the Koran to make that same claim against Islam, you will get a very respectful hearing.

The situation is much worse now with President Barack Hussein Obama – Rush Limbaugh calls him “Imam Hussein Obama” – presiding over an economically distressed country. The poor guy goes around trying to convince voters that he’s a Christian, not a Muslim, but it does no good.

Muslim-bashing entered its Golden Age, of course, after 9/11. But well before that, Muslims, Arabs (they're considered interchangeable) were seen by Americans no differently than they're seen by Israelis – no, worse, because Americans had no contact with Muslims to bring a little nuance to the image in their minds. And the image in their minds was of white-robed mobs running through the sand with sabers in their hands, led at a safe distance by some sinister, decadent oil sheikh.

I grew up in a very liberal household and environment, Jewish but not Zionist, and that was my image of Arabs. They weren't really like other people, they were like scorpions, so you couldn't think of them like you did regular people, you couldn't deal with them the same way. You couldn't afford to give them the rights, the freedoms that ordinary people are entitled to, because they'd just use them to kill you. They're *Arabs*.

That was my image growing up in Los Angeles in the '60s and '70s – and I was a liberal. I paid next to no attention to Israel, but somehow this notion of Arabs trickled down into my mind. Maybe from the movies, from TV, from wherever, but that was it. The image only began to change after I moved here. Meanwhile, among Americans, it's only gotten worse, much worse.

For Fortress Israel, of course, this has been a godsend. Taking all the reasons why America gives us such extraordinary support, let's not forget this one: Our enemies happen to be of the same ethnicity and religion as America's last openly despised minority. A miracle, isn't it?