

# HARPER'S

A satirical cartoon illustration depicting a chaotic scene on a wooden table. A large sheet of lined paper is pinned to the table, serving as a canvas for several caricatured figures. The figures include a Native American man in a blue cap and striped shirt, a man in a top hat and green coat, a man in a sombrero and yellow shirt, a man in a turban and grey robe, a man in a suit and white shirt, a man in a hat and white shirt, a man in a red shirt, and a man in a white shirt. The scene is marked by numerous red blood splatters, suggesting a violent event. A bottle of blue ink with the word 'INK' on it is visible on the right side of the table. The overall tone is dark and satirical, likely commenting on historical events or cultural conflicts.

*Also: David Samuels and Martha Gellhorn*



# DRAWING BLOOD

Outrageous cartoons and the art of outrage

By Art Spiegelman



THIS WORLD OF CREEPERS—Afraid of themselves, and of others, afraid of the Almighty, of life and of death.

—Art Young, 1907

The tragedy of the Danish “cartoon war” that erupted in February is that it really wasn’t about cartoons at all. Cartoons, even hateful ones, are symptoms of a disease, not the cause. Those Danish cartoons were what Alfred Hitchcock called a “McGuffin,” the almost irrelevant plot device that just gets a story rolling. The cartoon insults were used as an excuse to add more very real injury to an already badly injured world, and in this at least they succeeded. They polarized the West into viewing Muslims as the unassimilable Other; for True Believers, the insults were irrefutable proof of Muslim victimization, and served as recruiting posters for the Holy War.

I’m not a Believer, but I *do* truly believe that these now infamous and banal Danish cartoons need actually to be seen to be understood. If—as the currency of cliché has it—a

picture is worth a thousand words, it often takes a thousand more words to analyze and contextualize that picture. It isn’t a question of adding insult to an open wound like the far-right thugs of the British National Party did in February by distributing 500,000 leaflets of the emblematic hotheaded Prophet to sow more xenophobic discord. It’s a matter of demystifying the cartoons and maybe even robbing them of some of their venom. I believe that open discourse ultimately serves understanding and that repressing images gives them too much power.

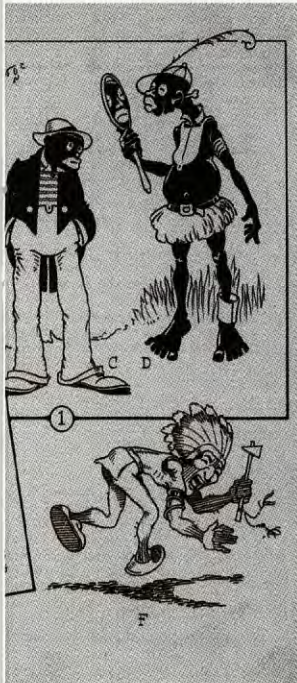
As a secular Jewish cartoonist living in New York City, I start out with four strikes against me, but I *really* don’t want any irate Muslims declaring holy war on me. (Although I’m not at all religious, I *am* a devout coward.) As a cartoonist, I hope to see cartoons and comics flour-

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as vultures, 1871, by Thomas Nast. A plate from *How to Create Cartoons*, 1941, by Frank F. Greene. *Gargantua*, a cartoon depicting King Louis-George Grosz. Clerics as crocodiles, representing the Catholic school threat to public education, in *The American River Ganges*, *the Priests and the Children*,



put stricter limits on free speech or revive blasphemy laws proposed in the U.N., the E.U., and beyond; boycotts of Danish goods costing over € 50 million in lost revenues; and even Danish pastries in Iran rechristened (though I suspect that might be the wrong word) "Roses of Muhammad." I'm sure the Danish cartoonists involved would all agree that it was a mistake to enter the "Draw the Prophet and win a prize" talent contest, but they at least managed to demonstrate the capacity of cartoons to bring urgent issues into high relief.

Sitting firmly on the left side of the secular-fundamentalist divide and on the hyphen between words and pictures, I'd like to put in a good word for cartoons despite—or perhaps even because of—their predisposition toward insult. Caricature is by definition a charged or loaded image; its wit lies in the visual concision of using a few deft strokes to make its point. The compression of ideas into memorable icons gives cartoons their ability to burrow deep into the brain; we humans are wired to distinguish, for example, a "have-a-nice-day" face from an abstract pattern in infancy, even before recognizing our mother's smile.

Cartoon language is mostly limited to deploying a handful of recognizable visual symbols and clichés. It makes use of the discredited pseudoscientific principles of physiognomy to portray character through a few physical attributes and facial expressions. It takes skill to use such clichés in ways that expand or subvert this impoverished vocabulary. Cartoonists like Honoré Daumier, Art Young, and George Grosz were masters of insult and were rewarded for their transgressions: Daumier was imprisoned for ridiculing Louis-Philippe; Art Young, the Socialist editor of *The Masses*, was tried for treason as a result of his anti-World War I cartoons; and George Grosz was tried variously for slander, blasphemy, and obscenity before fleeing Germany as the Nazis rose to power.

I don't mean to suggest that the Denmark Twelve belong in such exalted company, though



I do believe in the right to insult even if it sometimes puts me in the position of feeling personally insulted. It's just that cartoons are most aesthetically pleasing when they manage to speak truth to power, not when they afflict the afflicted. (Of course, every individual or group on the receiving end of a barbed cartoon feels afflicted. In my graphic novel, *Maus*, I managed to offend Jews, Poles, Germans, and even cat lovers like Desmond Morris, who claimed that my depiction of Nazis as cats was the worst thing to happen to ailurophiles since the Middle Ages. As a cover artist for *The New Yorker*, I've upset the New York City Police Department, our mayor and governor, Christians, Muslims, African Americans, and more Jews.)

Still, the *Jyllands-Posten*—a newspaper with a history of anti-immigrant bias—seemed somewhat disingenuous when it wrapped itself in the mantle of free speech to invite cartoonists to throw

pies at the face of Muhammad last September. The instigating editor claimed to be inspired by a Danish author's complaints that no illustrator would come forward to collaborate on a children's

book about the Prophet for fear of giving offense. But the editor didn't invite *illustrators* to step up to the plate; he invited cartoonists. *Cartoonists!* A breed of troublemakers by profession! The already put-upon Danish Muslim community walked right into the double-bind of feeling the intended insult, only to be told, when they protested, that they didn't understand Western values of free speech.

Danish imams, unhappy with the newspaper and their government's unwillingness to apologize, took the drawings to the Middle East and North Africa to discuss it with their more powerful brethren. Perhaps dismayed with the nuance or tepidity of the Danish cartoons, they added three far more scurrilous images—possibly of their own manufacture—to their portfolio of grievances. These included a xeroxed Associated Press photo of a bearded comedian in a snout mask from a provincial pig-squealing contest in France that had nothing at all to do with Islam but with the word "Muhammad" typed above it; a graffiti-quality scrawl titled "The pedophile 'prophet' Muhammad" that depicts a horned and bearded demon clutching two limp rag-doll women in his fists; and a crude photo collage of a Muslim man kneeling in prayer being mounted from the rear by a giant puppy. Of course barely anyone had seen those three extra pictures—in fact, virtually none of the millions of protesters saw any of the images.

It was enough to be told that insult was intended. The *Jyllands-Posten* could have saved the \$129 it paid each of its twelve cartoonists and simply printed a front-page headline in 64-point type that shouted "Yo' Prophet Wears Army Boots!"

By February, September's local insults had been instrumentalized to further various regional agendas, ranging from Iran's eagerness to deflect attention from its nuclear program to pro-Taliban forces in Pakistan finding these scrawls useful in their struggles against President Musharraf . . . and the "spontaneous" cartoon fatwa broke out across the globe. The framework—and even the meaning—of the Danish cartoons in question changed as the context went global and the besieged became the besiegers. Newspapers around the world had to decide whether to show the drawings as part of their reporting on the story or to suppress them—either in deference to Islamic sensibilities or due to fear of reprisals. Although I was stirred by the dozens of European papers that did reprint the cartoons out of solidarity with Denmark, it seemed that many of the papers involved instrumentalized the drawings in their own way, reinforcing their own anti-immigrant or Islamophobic biases.

Most news outlets in the United States declined to show the cartoons, professing a high-minded nod toward political correctness that smelled of hypocrisy and fear. Political cartooning in America has fallen on hard times since the glory days when Ben Franklin's "Join, or Die" image of a severed snake rallied the Colonies during the French and Indian War, or when Thomas Nast's acidic drawings of the Tweed ring brought down Tammany Hall a century later. In recent decades newspaper editors, increasingly fearful of offending readers or advertisers, have sublimated the cartoon's potency as a rhetorical weapon that can literally give shape to opinion. Hard-hitting cartoons have mostly been replaced by topical *laffs* in gag-cartoon format or by decorative "Op-Ed"-style illustrations whose meanings are often drowned in ambiguous surrealism. As a result, editorial cartoonists are now an endangered species, dying off even quicker than the newspapers that host them. There were over 200 full-time-staff editorial cartoonists employed by American newspapers in the 1980s, and there are fewer than 90 today. "Good riddance to bad rubbish," I hear beleaguered editors and infuriated Muslims chanting in unison. Both groups, after all, are notoriously wary of images.

As a maker of graven images, I found the *New York Times*' February 7 editorial rationale for not showing the offensive cartoons down-

# EDITORIAL CARTOONISTS ARE NOW AN ENDANGERED SPECIES, DYING OFF EVEN QUICKER THAN THE NEWSPAPERS



right offensive. They called it "a reasonable choice for news organizations that usually refrain from gratuitous assaults on religious symbols, especially since the cartoons are so easy to describe in words," although they never even described most of the cartoons verbally. Too easy, I guess. A day later, the *Times*' art critic, Michael Kimmelman, probed further into the power of the Danish cartoons and other totemic images that can stir or offend. The image his editors chose to publish alongside the column was . . . Chris Ofili's *Holy Virgin Mary!*—the elephant-dung-bedecked painting that got New York's Mayor Giuliani so apoplectic on behalf of his Catholic voters that he sued the Brooklyn Museum without ever even seeing Ofili's work. One can only assume that the painting was chosen over any of the more immediately germane cartoons because thin-skinned Christians are more likely to blow up abortion clinics than newspaper offices.\*

The Bush Administration, careful to pay lip service to free speech as it tries to export democracy to the Middle East, made a statement disapproving of the publication of the insensitive cartoons. An understandable reaction from a government that has an unholy passion for suppressing images of all sorts—from pictures of W. hanging out with Jack Abramoff, to photos of our troops' flag-draped coffins, to the recent batches of torture photos from Abu Ghraib.

In fact, the most baffling aspect of this whole affair is why all the violent demonstrations focused on the dopey cartoons rather than on the truly horrifying torture photos seen regularly on Al Jazeera, on European television, everywhere but in the mainstream media of the United States. Maybe it's because those photos of actual violation don't have the magical aura of things unseen, like the damn cartoons. Recently, when visiting campuses to lecture about comics, I was astonished by how few people seem to have actually seen the cartoons (or the new torture photos), despite how available they are on the web. Perhaps those with the necessary Googling skills are more interested in scouting up pictures of Paris Hilton. Some news outlets, unwilling to show

the cartoons directly, did indicate where the images could be found online, thereby trumpeting their own obsolescence.

I apologize in advance for how banal and inoffensive the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons appear to my secular eyes. I share a lack of knowledge



of Islam with these twelve artists, and it's our very cluelessness that must read as arrogance to the devout. I now know that many Muslims—though far from all!—believe that any depiction of Muhammad violates the taboo against idolatry, but there's no compelling reason (other than politeness or fear) for non-Muslim artists to avoid drawing Muhammad per se than there might be for those artists to wear skullcaps or turbans. Published under the headline "Muhammad's Face," this was the editor's ostensible point. It was the mocking tone built into the language of cartooning itself that was bound to offend all Believers.

\* Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the creators of Comedy Central's *South Park*, called attention to this specific brand of hypocrisy in their *Holy Week* episode. One of the show's kids, Kyle, pleads with a Fox executive not to censor a cartoon of Muhammad out of an episode of *Family Guy*, saying, "Either it's all okay or none of it is. Do the right thing." Stirred, the executive agrees to stand up for free speech, but when the image is about to appear, the screen fills instead with the message: "Comedy Central has refused to broadcast an image of Muhammad on their network." Soon after, we see an image of Jesus Christ defecating on President Bush and the American flag.



The featured central image, by Annette Carlsen, deals directly with the dilemma of representation. A man looks through a one-way mirror at seven suspects wearing turbans but doesn't recognize Muhammad. This image simultaneously acknowledges Danish ignorance about Muhammad and the dilemma of portraying the unportrayable, while also gently chiding the paper for turning the Prophet (and, by extension, Islam) into an object of suspicious scrutiny. The figure on the left, apparently a hippie (I haven't been able to determine if there's a more specific reference to any local politician or journalist) wears a peace sign that seems to set up a plea for a less aggressive response to the challenge of dealing with this whole can of worms. The second suspect is a caricature of Pia Kjaersgaard, head of Denmark's prominent anti-immigrant Danish People's Party. Suspects three, four, and five seem to represent Jesus, Buddha, and Moses, presumably in an attempt to level the playing field of insult. The friendly Semitic featured suspect number six might represent Muhammad, though he looks more like one of my college pals, Alvin, who used to sell me acid and taught me how to drive. The suspect with the goofy grin on the right is Kåre Bluitgen, the Danish author whose search for someone to illustrate his children's book on the life of Muhammad triggered the whole affair. He's holding a sign that translates as "KÅRE'S PR: Call and get an offer."

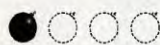


Danish author whose search for someone to illustrate his children's book on the life of Muhammad triggered the whole affair. He's holding a sign that translates as "KÅRE'S PR: Call and get an offer."



On the fatwa bomb meter I'd rate this drawing one lit bomb. Despite the artist's benign intent, anyone entering the gratuitous competition seems to rate at least that.

The cartoon by Bob Katzenelson at the top left of the *Jyllands-Posten* page also limits itself to commenting on the local catalyst for this issue, a caricature of Bluitgen—not Muhammad—as a talented P.R. agent seeking publicity for his children's book. Placing the very rudimentary stick figure drawing of a turbaned man in the author's hand might be understood as a way for the artist to distance himself from having drawn it and thus highlights the fear of transgression that the newspaper's dare elicited from many of these artists. (The orange in the turban connotes good luck and derives from a nineteenth-century play about Aladdin by the Danish romantic poet Adam Oehlenschläger.)



This cartoon simply doesn't rate as an insult aimed at anyone but Bluitgen.



Peder Bongaard superimposes a bearded and turbanned head onto an Islamic star and crescent, virtually exhausting the impoverished stockpile of visual symbols available to graphic artists commenting on any of this while making no point at all that I can gather. Perhaps it's intended as a proposed logo design for some branch of Islam not averse to representational imagery.



An extra bomb for the sheer gratuity of offering a drawing—a less than mediocre one—without even taking on the responsibility of saying anything at all, thereby offending the devout and the secular simultaneously.

Kurt Westergaard's incendiary but dignified drawing of an angry prophet—a bomb inscribed with the Islamic creed merged with his turban—has become the metonym for the whole controversy. In a February 28 interview with the *Jyllands-Posten*, the artist tried to clarify his intentions:

The cartoon is not directed against Islam as a whole, but against the part of it that obviously can inspire violence, terrorism, death and destruction. And therefore the fundamentalist aspect of Islam. I wanted to show that terrorists get their spiritual ammunition from Islam. . . . [T]he fuel behind the terrorists' action is supplied by interpretations of Islam. I think that conclusion is inescapable. That does not mean that all Muslims are responsible for terror.

I buy this explanation, though millions of Muslims apparently don't. The irate artist successfully discharged himself of the political cartoonist's duty to bring matters to a head. If the drawing had simply not appeared under the rubric of "Muhammad's Face," it would have been more immediately seen to specifically represent the murderous aspect of fundamentalism, the one that—through twisted public relations





and the events that followed the cartoon's publication—made this drawing a self-fulfilling prophecy.

One minor silver lining on this controversy's mushroom cloud has been that it has made the millions of moderate Muslims—enraged by having their faith reduced to this image—try to defuse the situation by distancing themselves from the outrages of political Islam even more articulately than they did after 9/11. I'm not often disposed toward optimism, but when the smoke clears, the large Muslim community that doesn't subscribe to violence might have a more sharply defined profile in the non-Muslim world.



Millions clamor for this artist's head. Emblematic of the whole controversy, this drawing is the one that the conventional wisdom gives all four bombs. I agree with the artist's contention that it was intended to refer very narrowly to jihadists but find it a somewhat hackneyed expression of that thought ... so I just can't give it more than three.



Poul Erik Poulsen's drawing, on the other hand, seems to express little more than a distaste for Islam in general. There is a modicum of conceptual wit in turning the crescent symbol into both a halo and horns on the head of a coyly innocent-looking turbaned figure, but in its inscrutable and sneaky way it argues that while posing as holy, the Prophet is actually a devil.

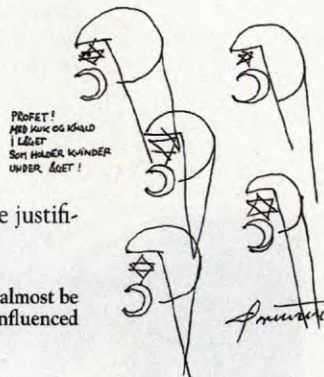


Three and a half "stealth" bombs for this one.

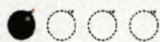
Erik Abild Sørensen's drawing has no redeeming features; in fact it has no features at all. Perhaps its abstraction is a nod to the Islamic taboo against images. The rhyming verse accompanying it (which might be translated as "Prophet, you crazy bloke! Keeping women under yoke") is mere name-calling, even if it is in the service of women's rights. Several descriptions of the drawing state that it represents five women's head scarves seen from the side, but it could as easily represent five Pac-men gobbling up Jewish stars and crescents. In this instance, I have to agree with the project's most vehement opponents: there is no possible justification for this image to have ever been printed!



My respect for craft and visual thought leads me to the conclusion that this drawing might almost be worth a fatwa. (I swear that Sørensen's dragging Jewish stars into this mess has not unduly influenced my judgment.)

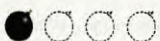


Claus Seidel's respectful offering seems to be a straightforward bid to get the gig as illustrator for Bluitgen's children's book, and he seems competent enough to deserve it. (The artist who finally did fulfill the commission was afraid to sign his name to it.) I am even more out of my theological depth than usual when trying to gauge any insult given by portraying Muhammad with dignity, but in *Charlie Hebdo* (the transgressive French humor magazine that reprinted these cartoons in February over Chirac's entreaties for restraint), a Swiss expert in law and religion, Sami Aldeeb, explains that even portraying the steed that transported Muhammad to Jerusalem is taboo. So by some standards this bedouin with a donkey may be doubly problematic.



One bomb (just to be on the safe side).

Arne Sørensen, demonstrably a journeyman cartoonist, contributes the most poignant and honest cartoon of the batch. It illustrates the heart of the issue: stone-cold fear. It's the subtext of all these cartoons: the rancid emotion manipulated by xenophobes, by Middle Eastern tyrants, and by our homegrown American tyrants as well. It's an intimate snapshot of "This World of Creepers" that we're bequeathing to our children.



I'm tempted to offer mercy to this cartoonist and let him off the hook with no bombs at all, but I'm afraid to. My sympathy for his plight might be seen as special pleading, since he did dare to draw some bearded guy in a kaffiyeh.







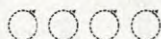
ROLIG VENER, NÅR DET KOMMER TIL ALT ER DET JO BARE EN  
TEGNING LAVET AF EN VANTRO SØNDERBYDE...

Franz Fuchsel, a cartoonist with a rather acidic sense of color, offers a slapstick *Arabian Nights* version of Muhammad restraining his angry guards while looking at a sheet of paper: "Relax, guys. At the end of the day, it's just a drawing by some infidel Dane from the middle of nowhere." Fuchsel's wishful thinking came from the same place as the previous cartoon. Less gracefully expressed, it betrays more insensitive stereotyping.



Fuchsel's unexamined typecasting earns him an extra bomb.

Appalled by the newspaper's premise, Lars Refn categorically refused to portray the founder of Islam. He draws a seventh-grade Muslim boy named Muhammad at the Valby School in an immigrant district of Copenhagen. The kid's shirt resembles the local "Frem" ["Forward"] soccer team uniform. "Frem" is punningly expanded into the word "Fremtiden" ["The Future"] emblazoned on his chest. The Farsi sentence on the blackboard translates to: "The *Jyllands-Posten* journalists are a bunch of reactionary provocateurs." The artist's part in this fiasco has forced him into putting on Groucho glasses and hiding in safe houses. It seems terribly unjust even by the screwy standards of a misguided cleric with bounty money to burn.



Zero fatwa bombs and a million dollar scholarship in Refn's name for the Valby School.

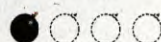


Rasmus Sand Høyer, a staff artist for the *Jyllands-Posten*, is clearly talented and clearly angry. The exact meaning of his drawing is somewhat less clear, or is at least difficult for me to formulate into words despite how easy it would be for a *New York Times* editorial writer. Høyer seems to be angry about the treatment of Islamic women and angry about Arabic violence. An overtly racist caricature of an angry Muhammad brandishes a short saber while flanked by two *niqabi*-veiled women in black. The black bar across his eyes that "censors" his identity is the inverse of the uncovered area that reveals the women's eyes. A graphic equivalence is made between the taboo against seeing the Prophet and the taboo against seeing women... but I'll be damned if I can figure out the exact point beyond an indication that the artist thinks shari'ah law is repressive.



Three and a half bombs, but clemency urged for the good graphic use of black.

The last cartoon in our clockwise tour of the *Jyllands-Posten*'s layout is a gentle-spirited gag cartoon by Jens Julius Hansen that gains nothing (but trouble) by insisting that the St. Peter role be played by Muhammad rather than some anonymous turbaned functionary. Although jokes about suicide bombers being rewarded with virgins after death were worn thin by Jay Leno a few years back, they gain piquancy when one learns that some scholars now believe that the Koran's reference to seventy-two virgins may be a mistranslation of seventy-two raisins. Apparently Mark Twain got it wrong when he noted that "the secret source of Humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven."



One fatwa bomb, strictly because the artist was hapless enough to send the cartoon to the *Jyllands-Posten* rather than trying his luck at *The New Yorker*.



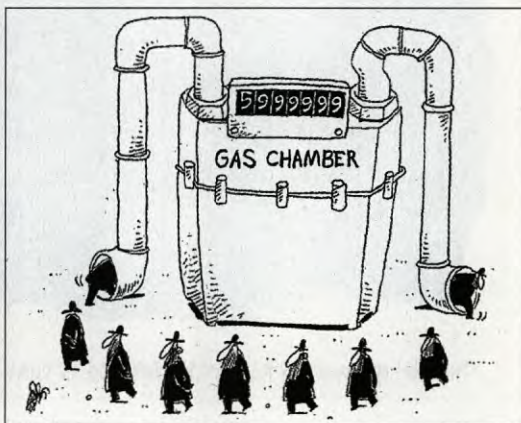
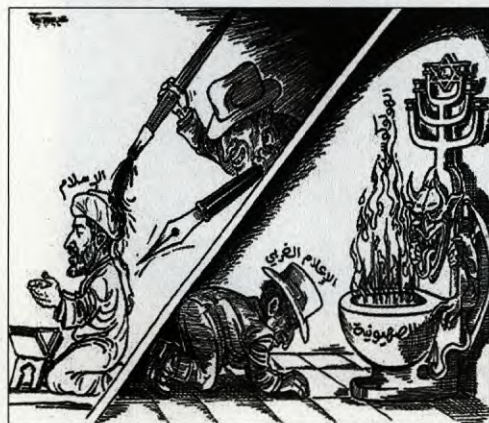
When these local cartoons metastasized into a frenzy of international protests that ranged from extreme but legitimate forms like economic boycotts and Danish-flag burning (a form of symbolic insult against a nation somewhat analogous to the original offense against Islam) to the violent excesses of credible death threats and attacks against embassies, none of the responses was more flabbergasting than Iran's announcement that it would host an international Holocaust cartoon contest as payback, to "test" the limits of Western tolerance of free speech.

Although it fit well with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Holocaust-denying, anti-Israel agenda, it struck me as a little unjust—even somewhat paranoid—to punish Jews for Danish sins. Yes, I know that the dominant Arab take on Israel is that it was created to punish Palestinians for European sins, but it still didn't seem cricket to hold an international competition that would give Arab cartoonists such an unfair advantage: their officially sanctioned anti-Zionist cartoons have given them more practice at honing the centuries-old craft of anti-Semitic caricature than anyone since Philipp Rupprecht cartooned for *Der Stürmer*.

The cynically conceived contest that equated insulting a religious belief with denying bloody and incontrovertible history did win some debating points less than two weeks after it was announced when an overzealous Austrian court

sentenced David Irving to three years in prison for Holocaust denial. I personally believe that it couldn't—and shouldn't—have happened to a nicer guy, but growing up with two parents who survived Auschwitz, I had to reconcile myself long ago to the occasionally painful consequences of supporting free speech. I grew up sometimes confusing Lenny Bruce with Jesus and had signed on to the view of hate speech once eloquently expressed by Louis Brandeis, the first Jewish justice to the Supreme Court, back in 1927, when the court was still a separate branch of government: "If there be time to expose through discussion the falsehood and fallacies, to avert the evil by the processes of education, the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence."

The most inspired response to the Iranian contest was proffered by some artists in Tel Aviv who announced their own Israeli anti-Semitic cartoon contest, stating: "We'll show the world we can do the best, sharpest, most offensive Jew-hating cartoons ever published! No Iranian will beat us on our home turf!" In the interests of full disclosure, I must reveal that I was invited to be a judge for this contest after a page of my cartoons of a similar bent were published in *The New Yorker*. Sadly, most of the submissions were not nearly as inspired as the bravado of the original gesture. Demonstrating the limits of simple irony, they were embarrassingly unable to rise to a more complex irony that might make some point



Top left: Although it wasn't drawn as an entry in the Iranian contest, this February 19 cartoon from Qatar's *Ash-Sharq* newspaper offers some perspective on the ef-frontery of the Danish cartoons. The kneeling figure on the left is labeled "Islam"; the fellow kneeling on the right is labeled "Western Media." The flames emanating from the toilet bowl cum shrine are labeled "The Holocaust."

Top right: Mazyar Bizhani's entry in the Iranian anti-Semitic cartoon contest. Bottom right: Doron Nissimi's entry in the Israeli anti-Semitic cartoon contest cleverly places a Hasidic hat on Kurt Westergaard's bomb-turbaned prophet.

Bottom left: Sharon Rosenzweig's entry in the Israeli contest. Jeezis!!!





Above: My final solution to Iran's anti-Semitic cartoon contest

other than the one that we Jews do indeed have a highly developed sense of irony. It's humiliating to report that—if one can put aside ideological issues and reality—most of the entries flooding into the well-subsidized Iranian contest display a greater degree of graphic skill.

Undaunted by the grim nastiness of the Cartoon Wars of 2006, I'd like to modestly propose an even larger one: a world-class, nuclear bake-off of rancorous visual satire with Halliburton-sized payouts! The old African-American tradition of "playing the dozens" offers

a model. Each putdown, or *snap*, ups the ante. In such "rank-out" contests, opponents leave razors and guns at the door, sublimate their antagonism, and take turns hurling clever, well-shaped rhyming invectives at one another. Win or lose, a player in such a battle of wits has the chance to earn respect from his opponents. So I propose that all armed combatants be yanked from the Middle East, and I dream of battalions of cartoonists airlifted in from all corners of the globe to replace them! Feelings will no doubt be badly bruised, but in the end may the artists with the sharpest pen points prevail. ■