

US right responds to anti-Muslim cartoon controversy

New York Times columnist David Brooks proposes the ‘good crusade’

David Walsh
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Right-wing columnist David Brooks of the *New York Times* has weighed in on the anti-Muslim cartoon furor. In a piece entitled “Drafting Hitler,” Brooks offers himself as a spokesman for Western Civilization against Muslim Savagery.

After references to reactionary cartoons published in the Arab world in retaliation for the Danish provocation, including openly anti-Semitic ones, Brooks addresses himself to the Islamic fundamentalists: “We in the West were born into a world that reflects the legacy of Socrates and the agora... We believe in progress and in personal growth. By swimming in this flurry of perspectives, by facing unpleasant facts, we try to come closer and closer to understanding... Our mind-set is progressive and rational. Your mind-set is pre-Enlightenment and mythological.”

Brooks’ smugness and self-admiration as he gazes at himself in the mirror can only inspire loathing. One is reminded of Oscar Wilde’s line, “To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance.”

Just who does Brooks think he’s fooling? This individual, who earns a very handsome salary by laboring twice a week in the pages of the *Times* on behalf of the most predatory elements in American society, proposes to lecture his readers about science, progress and rationality.

Since Brooks wants to discuss Western Civilization, there are certain not so edifying episodes, even in recent times, one might bring up: virulent nationalism, anti-Semitism, fascism, colonialism, imperialism. These ‘blemishes’ have inflicted untold suffering and death on masses of human beings.

However, Brooks, formerly of the Republican right *Weekly Standard* and the *Wall Street Journal*, turns a blind eye. A defense of yesterday’s swinishness justifies today’s. The columnist speaks for a world of arrogant, affluent people who believe the crimes that lie behind their wealth will go unnoticed and unpunished.

It would not be too difficult to prove that Bush and his cohorts personify the forces and conceptions against which progressive thought had to make its wearisome way from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries and beyond. Brooks pontificates about reason, but he sees eye to eye with an administration that considers ‘rationalism’ a dirty word and relies on backwardness and virulent reaction more than any other government in US history. The most zealous member of the Muslim Brotherhood has nothing on the apocalyptic wing of the Republican Party.

Various Christian fundamentalist sects make up one of the most devoted elements of the Republican ‘base.’ Individuals and organizations that believe that we have entered into the End Times,

with the Second Coming of Christ drawing nigh, receive a sympathetic hearing in the White House.

John Hagee of the Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, who is close to former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, preaches that the day is fast coming when “All over the earth, graves will explode as the occupants soar into heaven.”

A strand known as “Dominionism” believes that Christ will only reappear once the world has made a place for him and that a first step is the Christianizing of America. One of its representatives, James Kennedy of the Coral Ridge Ministries in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, whom Bush consulted before his run for the presidency, has proclaimed, “Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost. As the vice regents of God, we are to exercise godly dominion and influence over our neighborhoods, our schools, our government, our literature and arts, our sports arenas, our entertainment media, our news media, our scientific endeavors—in short, over every aspect and institution of human society.”

A leading Dominionist, Rev. Richard Land, top lobbyist for the 16-million-member Southern Baptist Convention, enjoys a weekly conference call with top Bush advisers, including Karl Rove.

In March 2004, National Security Council Near East and North African Affairs director Elliott Abrams, criminally implicated in the Iran-Contra scandal two decades ago, gave an off-the-record briefing to a delegation from the Apostolic Congress. A sect of Pentecostal Christians, this group believes that the world will end in a fiery Armageddon.

Like many so-called Christian Zionists, the Apostolics were concerned about the Israeli handover of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority. Until Israel is intact and Solomon’s Temple rebuilt, they are apparently convinced, Christ won’t return to earth. (They believe only 144,000 Jews will be saved in the coming apocalypse.)

According to the *Village Voice*, which obtained a confidential memo detailing the meeting, Abrams assured the group that “the Gaza Strip had no significant Biblical influence such as Joseph’s tomb or Rachel’s tomb and therefore is a piece of land that can be sacrificed for the cause of peace.”

The Bush administration has waged a veritable war on science. Only a year ago the American population was subjected to the reactionary campaign over Terry Schiavo, who had suffered irreversible and devastating brain damage. For hours on end, on the cable television networks, religious fanatics of various stripes were provided with a platform for their ugly and perverse views, all in the name of the

‘culture of life.’

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted recently, the Republican Party is associated with two distinct attacks on science: “the attempt by giant corporations to mold science to suit their interests, or attack it when it does not; and the drive of religious fundamentalists to undermine science on such questions as stem cell research, evolution and contraception.” The Intelligent Design movement, an attempt to provide anti-evolutionist Creationism with a slightly more respectable veneer, is openly supported by Bush and the Republicans.

Last June it emerged that a Bush aide who reportedly altered government climate reports to favor the interests of the oil industry had resigned from the administration to take a job at ExxonMobil, the world’s largest energy company and a fervent opponent of carbon emissions regulations.

The *New York Times* reported June 8, 2005 that during his tenure as chief of staff for the White House Council on Environmental Quality, Philip Cooney repeatedly altered government scientific reports to deemphasize the link between carbon emissions and global warming and cast doubt on the science of climate change.

Only recently the top climate scientist at NASA, James E. Hansen, charged that the Bush administration had attempted to prevent him from speaking out since he gave a lecture in December calling for reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases linked to global warming. Hansen told the press, “They [Bush administration officials] feel their job is to be this censor of information going out to the public.”

So much for progress, rationality and science. What is the cartoon controversy really about?

In Brooks’ column something quite repugnant is lurking. It has appeared before: the “Yellow Peril,” the “White Man’s Burden.” We have a recycling of Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* via Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations*.

Writing after the Persian Gulf War of 1991, Huntington claimed that the conflict between the Islamic world and the West represented “no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.”

Brooks even uses the latter phrase, claiming that the current controversy has reminded “many of us in the West... how vast the chasm is between you and us. There was more talk than ever about a clash of civilizations. We don’t just have different ideas; we have a different relationship to ideas.”

He pretends to address only the fundamentalist element. Others in the right-wing camp are not so coy. Preacher Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, has called Islam “a very evil and very wicked religion.” Pat Robertson, once a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, compared the Koran to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Long before the current crisis, Jerry Falwell, another right-wing evangelist, declared, “I think Muhammad was a terrorist.”

Certain things are clear about the current crisis over the anti-Muslim cartoons. What began as an effort to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment, to stir the waters of right-wing Danish politics in that bastion of Western Civilization, Jutland, has become a world issue.

Initially, there was some doubt and disagreement within the Bush administration as to how this should be played. Some calculated that with 140,000 American troops occupying a predominantly Muslim country, this might not be the best time to inflame the situation.

However, as the crisis evolved, administration officials no doubt sensed, particularly in the response of certain liberal elements, an opportunity. Here was a chance to recast a policy of colonial

aggression, the effort to establish a stranglehold over the world’s energy supply and, in the process, subjugate an entire region, as the defense of civilization, democracy and free speech.

The free speech issue is entirely spurious. No one at the WWSWS has suggested that the anti-Muslim cartoons should be suppressed. People have the right to publish stupid and ugly material.

But we socialists also reserve the right to say what is, to size up and denounce a malicious provocation when we see one. Fascists have the right to march through a Jewish or black neighborhood, but we would not hold this up as a model of the expression of free speech, nor would we condemn those who greeted such a procession with a thick hail of stones.

Nor does anyone have to be convinced of the innocence of the motives of all those organizing protest demonstrations in the Islamic world. There are right-wing, fundamentalist and anti-Semitic forces working toward their own ends. We reject those forces and their ends. But that does not oblige us to see the world as Brooks would have us see it.

In the upside down version of events promoted by the *Times* columnist and others, the oppressed people of the Middle East, on whom endless violence and humiliation have been inflicted by the US and other Western powers, are the brutal, bloodthirsty party.

The logic of Brooks’ argument and similar ones leads in a truly ominous direction. How is this incorrigible and almost subhuman Muslim population, which happens to sit on top of much of the planet’s oil reserves, to be dealt with? Would not “civilization,” in the form of American imperialism, be justified in using the most effective methods, including nuclear weapons and other genocidal technologies, to cleanse the region and make it safe for democracy?

The Bush administration is making an effort to turn the Iraq occupation and any future attacks—say on Iran or Syria—into the ‘good war.’ There remain middle class liberal and left forces who have not yet jumped the old ship and climbed aboard the new. They have missed numerous opportunities.

Layers of this milieu have already peeled off, one after the other. The collapse of the Soviet Union propelled a good many rightward; the civil war in Yugoslavia took another crowd, particularly in Europe; the September 11 attacks brought a new element in the US into the patriotic camp; the war to ‘liberate’ Iraq from Saddam Hussein convinced a further portion of liberals.

There are more than a few remaining ‘lefts’ all too eager to bolt, hardly able to hold themselves back, who are now being offered the opportunity to join a war for Western, secular values against savage, fanatical Islam—to enlist in the ‘good Crusade.’



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