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What we can Learn from the Charlie Hebdo Massacre

On the morning of January 7, two armed gunmen entered Charlie Hebdo Headquarters, a satirical cartoon publisher in Paris, France and fired upwards of 50 gunshots, gunning down eleven cartoonists and one police officer. This occurred in protest of the magazine’s satirical cartoons of Mohammed and against Muslim traditions. The two shooters, who were caught and killed in a gunfight involving hostages, were Islam extremists trying to make a statement. In no way are the murders of many ever justified, nor should violence ever be the solution to our problems. However, as we move forward from this horrendous event, what should we do to learn from this? In Sandip Roy’s article “#JeSuisCharlie? No I’m not really Charlie Hebdo; Here’s why,” the author proposes that although freedom of speech is important, being sensitive of others’ beliefs, whether different from your own, is also important as well. On the flip side, in her article “Freedom of Speech and Business: What Charlie Hebdo taught us (again),” Jaana Woiceshyn believes the right method to protect full freedom of speech would be to increase production and increase security to make sure an attack doesn’t happen again.

Roy’s article covers the typical debate between morality and freedom of speech. Roy expresses that although “we want free speech to be absolute, in the real world, it is not.” He goes on to how many believe that the deaths of the cartoonist were due to the fact that they wrote “bad satire,” or racist and xenophobic cartoons. In her article, on the other hand, Jaana is more interested in the relationship between freedom of speech and commerce. Jaana believes that “[a business] must uphold its right to liberty and freedom of speech” and instead OF DOING WHAT, it should increase security to do so. She thought that in order for businesses to thrive, there must be no limit on what can be produced by the media, meaning that freedom of speech must be upheld at all costs.

In both articles, the authors focused on segregating Muslims with similar word choices, but to completely different ends. In Roy’s article, he makes a clear distinction between Muslims and terrorists by mentioning that “Hassen Chalghoumi, the imam of Drancy mosque in Paris says, ‘These are criminals, barbarians. They [the gunmen] have sold their souls to hell.’” With words such as “they” and “these,” it’s as if treating the gunman as a separate group, a lesser group such as “those people”. In her article, Jaana segregates Muslims in a different way, and in my opinion, a less appealing way. Jaana does not argue that Muslims are different from terrorists, but instead she argues that Muslims are different from most other groups in society by labeling them a group analogous to barbarians. She does this when discussing the YEAR Danish attacks and writes, “[violence-prone Muslims] cannot attack all of us.” Like Roy, she also makes an “us versus them” distinction, but not in the same manner. Her depiction of Muslims as “them” versus the rest of “us,” seems to define all Muslims as extremists or terrorists.

Similarly, in both articles, each author considers the way that Charlie Hebdo can minimize future danger, whether by increasing security or from publishing less offensive and culturally insensitive cartoons. Roy, although not fully focused on tightening down censorship, argues that when creating something for the public to see, one must be cognizant and fully aware of how it might affect others, something that Roy himself could not bring himself to do with the Charlie Hebdo Magazines. On the other hand, Jaana was focusing more on “increased security, not self-censorship [as] the answer.”

As for both sides, I am in more agreement with Roy’s article. I do fully believe in freedom of speech and believe we must do whatever we can to uphold these values, but those values should also draw a very fine line. When you’re publishing cartoons and articles that “would not be published in most parts of the world,” especially ones dealing with very racist and xenophobic representations, such as Charlie Hebdo’s, I would find it very hard in my heart to publish such things that would go against my own personal morale. Yes freedom of speech is important, but so is accepting people who are different from yourself, instead of using freedom of speech to segregate them even more. The controversy around Charlie Hebdo isn’t as much about freedom of speech as it is about Charlie Hebdo’s justifications for being crude and xenophobic, and now that the unfortunate shooting has happened, the French are just going to further look at Muslims as a foreign entity that doesn’t belong and berate them as terrorists when the extremists should NOT represent the whole of Islam. So I as well, am not Charlie Hebdo.

Nate:

You do such a great job of finding the rhetorical similarities between two articles that have such drastically different points of view. I love the concept of your first paragraph, how the authors both use the language of “us versus them” but in very different ways. Where Roy is using “Us versus Them” to talk about how not all Muslims are terrorists, Jaana is using the same exact language to depict all Muslims as just that. What a brilliant and sophisticated observation! And then I like how you consider how they are both offering a solution to the problem, but that their solutions are so different. Your last sentence is a perfect kicker, too!

The biggest thing to focus on in your revisions isn’t your ideas, but your sentence level writing. Some of your sentences are a bit wordy and vague or you use words that obscure the real meaning of your ideas. I did a lot of line edits for you and wrote notes about how to switch words and phrases in order to help you make your brilliant observations clearer for your reader.

Thanks!