

# OPINION

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## Offender and offended: both deserve free speech

*We can be Charlie but not offensive*



Stéphane Charbonnier, former director of Charlie Hebdo, was one of the four staff members shot and killed in their office.

Pour être ou ne pas être Charlie (to be or not to be Charlie)?

Suppose I wrote an article insulting your religion, your mother and everything you hold near and dear to your heart.

Do you write a letter to the editor? Do you stage a protest?

Do you pick up a gun?

Islamist radicals attacked Charlie Hebdo, a French satirical magazine known for its cartoons mocking Muhammad on Jan. 7.

In the outpouring of sympathy that came afterwards, people divided into two camps. Some supported the magazine, saying "Je suis Charlie" (French for "I am Charlie"), while others expressed sympathy but avoided condoning the publication.

Though we may not support some of the offensive things Charlie Hebdo has published, we are still Charlie. We must stand for freedom of expression, even though that includes offensive speech.

"Killing journalists is a form of terrorism that (destroys) human rights and freedom of speech, and I think a journalist being murdered in his own office this way in a country such as France is unacceptable, even if his cartoons may seem offensive to some people," said Théophile Gatté, a resident of France, via email.

After the attack, #JeSuisCharlie became one of the most popular Twitter hashtags with almost 6,500 tweets per minute at its height. During demonstrations after the attack, thousands of people held up "Je suis Charlie" signs in solidarity with Charlie Hebdo. People created T-shirts, buttons and even iPhone apps that allowed people to express their support.

But other people had reservations. No high-level American officials joined the more than 40 world leaders who helped lead demonstrations after the attack. Articles such as "I Am Not Charlie Hebdo" graced the opinion pages of The New York Times and others.

Some avoided joining the chorus because of the cartoons that Charlie Hebdo had published, especially those of Muhammad that many Muslims found blasphemous.

"If my good friend Dr. Gasparri says a curse word

against my mother, he can expect a punch," said Pope Francis to reporters during a news conference after the attacks. "You cannot insult the faith of others."

The divide has led to debate worldwide.

"This attack has created a union of the French people, and of the world, for freedom of speech, yet it has also divided our nation," said Daphné Gatté, a resident of France, in an email. "Some have started speaking nonsense about (the attacker's) religion, while others support the attackers saying Charlie Hebdo 'deserved this.'"

Some of the things Charlie Hebdo has published in the past are downright tasteless at best. Organizations such as CNN, The Telegraph and The Daily News felt compelled to blur or crop out cartoons from photos of Charlie Hebdo. Past covers of the magazine include Muhammad telling readers "100 lashes if you don't die laughing!" and God, Jesus and a symbol for the Holy Spirit having anal sex.

Freedom of expression is not the same thing as freedom of good expression. Freedom of expression means the ability to say whatever a person wants, not what somebody else thinks they should be able to say.

There are limits on freedom of expression when it becomes necessary to protect public welfare. However, Charlie Hebdo never wrote or drew anything in this category. No one could have reasonably expected the attack as a consequence of their cartoons.

But there's a flip side to this as well.

"If, in fact, we defend the legal right of a person to insult another's religion, we're equally obligated to use our free speech to condemn such insults and stand shoulder to shoulder with religious communities, particularly religious minorities, who were targets of such attacks," said President Barack Obama at the National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 5.

Free speech self-regulates. Other people can speak out against those who say offensive things. The attackers should not have taken up a gun. They should have taken up a pen.

France must not only protect the rights of Charlie Hebdo but also of their opponents. Worryingly, it seems France forgot that in the aftermath of the attack when they arrested 54 people for hate speech and statements glorifying terrorism.

We are not Charlie because we support offensive speech. We are Charlie because we support the right to free speech, by both the offender and the offended.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Neutrality allows injustice to continue

To my fellow political observers, analysts, scholars and human beings who like to know what is happening in our world: There is an increasingly apparent idea that, in order to be considered "credible" in our political analysis, we must be unbiased and/or neutral. Methodological imperialism has created an artificial "zero point" from which we dare not depart in our analyses or face rejection for not maintaining enough "critical distance."

Critical and emotional distance from occupation, massacres, the stripping of our dignity, black genocide, usurpation of land and rights is our zero point of "balanced" analysis and reasoning. Our only way to be heard and taken seriously by (for a lack of a better term) the White Man is to remain politically neutral to injustice. That way, we can avoid the vague discomfort of acknowledging modern-day oppression both within our borders and abroad. That way, we can continue business as usual. That way, we can continue the same narrative used by colonizers that makes subjugation sensible or acceptable, perpetuating a level of white supremacist domination by reproducing a tired trope that there is space to remain neutral. We are to treat our facts, what we know to be truth, as another viewpoint to be equally balanced against another.

Often times, we fail to see that neutrality and objectivity are two different levels of analysis. There need not be a fact-value split when our values stem from hard facts.

As those invested in current events, we should note that bias is the product of our objective reading of the politically constructed reality that has been built. Neutrality is a colonial tool that has been built to keep us from speaking the truth. By embracing this ideology, we are stripped not only of our humanity, but of our objectivity too. Take pride in standing for justice and speaking up against injustice. #BlackLivesMatter #FreeGaza

Jordan Clark '14

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Don't dismiss the struggles of others

In response to the article "Society should relax rules about men's clothing," I really don't know how to put my feelings nicely. There is a blatant lack of understanding of how gender is constructed, and a blatant lack of respect towards the societal pressure of women. I myself, as a cisgender male (meaning I identify as a man and have a penis), share similar privilege as the author, but where he fails to acknowledge his privilege I hope to not only acknowledge my own privilege but to use it in solidarity with those that are harmed by this societal way of thinking.

Now, the truth of the matter is that issues of what clothing is appropriate versus inappropriate has always come out as a gendered issue, but the author wrongly uses the idea of genderqueer and our need to genderqueer issues of clothing specifically by saying that Guilford is a genderqueer safe house. The idea of genderqueer is all about breaking the boundaries between sex and gender and allowing people to express themselves beyond the cisgender binary. This includes the fact that a person's gender has nothing to do with what "good ol' genitalia" they are packing. The fact that the author asserts that men — all men, by his assumptions — have penises, puts into view that he does not understand what genderqueer even means. So how can Guilford be a genderqueer safe house when people, like the author, not only do not understand the idea of genderqueer but also push cisgender ideas of men and women?

We aren't a genderqueer safe house, and the author cannot use that fact to try and validate his odd need for "men's" penises to be out in the open on campus. The societal reason that we do not let people have their penises out (or show the outline of their penises) is the same reason that we do not let people with vaginas have their vaginas out in the open. He simply brings out the fact that cisgender women (meaning people who identify as a woman and have vaginas) can wear spandex and cisgender men cannot to push out inequalities. He does not bring out the fact that cisgender men have far more freedom over what parts don't need to be covered in clothing (like their entire chest). He simply dismisses the entire struggle of cisgender women in society, and in turn by not acknowledging the spectrum of gender, he is also dismissing the struggle of people who do not fall into the binary.

I'm not denying that there are some interesting issues brought up by pushing the boundaries of fashion. However, there are so many issues with the way the author brings up the argument that we cannot start to talk about these issues until there is an actual understanding of the underlying issues. So please, next time you want to talk about something that stems from complex issues, be informed enough to, one, not insult people and, two, to actually back up your opinions.

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