4. Yale University Press has been roundly criticized for its recent executive decision not to publish the offending 12 images in its new study of the scandal, *The Cartoons that Shook the World*, by Jytte Klausen. It justified its move by arguing that this was necessary to prevent further violence. Is YUP beholden to the same standards of restraint that Lipman advises in the public sphere?

Yale University Press’ recent decision to omit the controversial caricatures of Mohammad in Jytte Klausen’s *The Cartoons that Shook the World*, which detailed the Danish paper Jyllands-Posten’s 2005 publication of the cartoons that incited worldwide controversy between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, provoked ardent debate. Despite cries of defaming self-censorship, YUP was justified in its decision to omit the Jyllands-Posten cartoons; they, like Lipman, recognized the distinction between the right to publish sensitive material and the validity of the decision to do so. Lipman’s viewpoint rightly considers the cartoon debate not in the narrow context of freedom of speech, but within the larger issue of tension between religion, morality, and cultural sensitivity in the international community. In omitting the drawings from Klausen’s book, YUP made choice most likely to encourage respectful cultural dialogue in adhering to Lipman’s notion that “self-censorship isn’t a deprivation of the right to free expression” (Lipman 6).

First, it is important to explore the possible outcomes of reprinting the cartoons in Klausen’s book by examining the consequences of international newspapers including the cartoons in coverage of the editorial. Embassies in the Middle East, including those of Austria and Norway, were attacked when newspapers in their countries published the caricatures (WikiNews); protests, sometimes violent, erupted worldwide (Haider). Given these precedents, YUP had great motivation to exclude the cartoons, especially considering the easy accessibility of the images to readers through the internet. Additionally, the drawings are hardly cheated by
solely physical descriptors; to depict the most infamous cartoon as Mohammad with a bomb in his turban is certainly doing it justice. “When it came between [publishing this controversial book] and blood on my hands,” YUP director John Donatich said, “there was no question” (qtd. in Cohen). Publishing the pictures would elicit further negative consequences beyond short-term bloodshed, however: it would add fuel to the cultural conflict that erupted following the original editorial that ignored real East and West exchanges in favor of a stilted, black and white discussion on freedom of speech as a single entity.

Critics of YUP’s judgment seem to overlook the real issue at hand. While the initial controversy might have passed for a (seemingly) straightforward debate about the right of freedom of speech, the subsequent explosion of criticism and debate from the international community forced the issue into a larger context. Many in favor of the cartoon’s inclusion in Klausen’s book did not entirely comprehend the Muslim world’s perception of the statements made by publications that reprinted the images. To many Muslims, the publishing of caricatures mocking their revered prophet was taken as a cultural slight, a rejection of not free speech in and of itself but Islam as a religion and even a civilization. It was not that Jyllands-Posten-defenders were unaware there were cultural conflicts at play, but many ignored the extent of the clash in favor of championing the idea that Muslims were simply opponents of free speech. A lack of cultural understanding was seen prominently throughout the debate. For example, Tim Pankhurs, editor of a New Zealand paper that reprinted the cartoons, asked “If we allow Christianity and more particularly the Catholic Church and the Pope to be satirized, and we do, should Islam be treated differently?” (qtd. in WikiNews). But Mohammad is not like the Pope in
that there are absolute rules declaring that Mohammad is not to be depicted in drawings. Such knowledge gaps about Islam were not uncommon in the debate.

Thus, it was pertinent for decisions about printing the cartoons to be made with the kind of cultural sensitivity Lipman backs. “The advocacy of a free press needs to be coupled with a necessary sensitivity and prudence so we anticipate the impact of our words and actions,” he writes. “The question isn't merely whether a newspaper may print particular material but whether such material is a moral choice in today's world” (Lipman 6). In summary, YUP certainly had the right to publish the cartoons. But to do so would stifle the possibility of the legitimate discussion on Islam and censorship Jyllands-Posten claimed to be encouraging in their original action. In making a call that would conciliate many Muslims stung by the crisis, YUP opened up the kind of moderate cultural discussion Jyllands-Posten’s denied the international community. By publishing extreme depictions of a religion, the newspaper could only expect to elicit extreme reactions in turn, isolating the voice of the moderate Muslim they professed to include in the debate their editorial prompted. Granted, Lipman’s call for “freedom of expression and multiculturalism [to] live together in a world where we make an effort to honor both” (Lipman 6) rings perhaps overly idealistic, but overall, YUP’s decision was a far cry from the act of “intellectual cowardice” (qtd. in Needham and Paul) former US Ambassador to the UN John Bolton declared it.
Works Cited


