

What rhymes with imbecile?



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AS AMERICA geared up for the recent election, the highlight was the clash of the candidates in their TV debates.

In one of the exchanges, Governor Romney said, "Of course rules of fairness have to be enforced, for what other safeguards do we have except the Press?"

The irony of this remark was not lost on the audience who erupted in laughter and applauded. Then Governor Romney continued, "I would never suggest the Press is biased. They have their job to do and I have my job to do. My job is to lay out a positive view for the future of the country. And their job is to make sure that no one finds out about it."

There was much more laughter at these words.

Sadly though, Press bias is no laughing matter.

In the lead up to the recent clash in Gaza an e-mail arrived, pointing to CNN's coverage of the Hamas escalation where more missiles rained down on Israeli towns and led to the Israelis' response.

It read:

"Several hours late CNN finally noticed something was happening in Israel and Gaza.

"Not: 70+ rockets fired at Israeli civilians.

"Not: 200,000 Israeli schoolchildren sent home because of rocket barrage.

"Not: Israeli 'Iron Dome' successfully intercepts 7 Grad Rockets targeting major civilian centres.

"All they managed was '4 killed in Israeli air strike on Gaza.'

"Maybe that's all they wanted us to know?"

It's not too long ago that I was living in the UK. The daily diet of anti-Israel reporting in the written and broadcast media, including ones that I sometimes worked for, was more than depressing; it was intimidating and threatening.

Anti-Semites love to crawl out from beneath their rocks to shout and scream "Anti-Zionism" but what they are really shouting is "Anti-Semitism". As Martin Luther King Jr said in 1968, "When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews. You're talking anti-Semitism."

I often wondered if it would be possible for me as an individual Jew to sue one of the mainstream UK newspapers when they were later found to have circulated propaganda and lies about the conflict in the Middle East, instead of facts.

Maybe you recall the shocking photograph of the Israeli soldier wielding a baton and standing over a bleeding and beaten Palestinian crouched on the ground?

Newspaper headlines explained that this poor Palestinian had been beaten by the Israeli on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Behind the pair was a baffling sight. Clearly visible, you could see that someone had inexplicably opened a petrol station on this most holy of sites.

Actually, where the incident occurred was nowhere near the Temple Mount. The beaten and bloody figure on the ground was a Jew being protected from further attack or even death at the hands of an Arab mob by that baton-wielding Israeli soldier.

What about the recent picture of the two dead children who were killed by Assad's forces in Syria circulated by Palestinian media as victims of Israel's attack.

Whenever inflammatory stories of that kind appeared in the UK, physical attacks on Jews go through the roof.

One appalling example occurred shortly after Israel's war against Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006. A twelve-year-old Jewish schoolgirl was severely beaten on a London bus after being asked by a gang of Asians if she was a Jew. Beaten unconscious, the gang then stamped on her head as she lay on the floor fracturing her eye socket.

Journalists and news media spread falsehoods about Israel and, to paraphrase Dr King, pour fuel on the smouldering embers of European anti-Semitism. These embers take very little to burst into flames, threatening to burn ordinary Jews like that little girl or anyone like me who is identifiably Jewish.

Doctors are trained how to identify illness and treat it. Journalists are trained to identify the truth and report facts. Their profession teaches them how to do so. If you have ever studied journalism the phrase, "check your facts" is

drummed into you repeatedly.

There are only two ways a journalist fails in this regard. The first is that he or she is simply hopeless at their profession. The second is that they have a reason for ignoring the truth or slanting it to advance their own or their employer's agenda. It's called Press or Media bias.

Well, thank goodness I now live in the US. Such things wouldn't happen here of course. Oh really!

I wonder if you can cast your mind back a few weeks and recall someone called Sam Bacile? It rhymes with "imbecile". He produced a film in California called, *The Innocence of Muslims*.

This film, which called Islam a "cancer" and made offensive statements about the religion's founder, so inflamed followers of Islam all over the world, that it sparked demonstrations and riots. It also led to the killing of four Americans in Libya including the US ambassador, Chris Stephens.

The rioting and death toll spread further afield to Egypt and Pakistan, a US ally where a government minister offered a reward of \$100,000 to anyone who kills Sam Bacile, a US citizen.



Are the Wall Street Journal and Associated Press reporters indeed simply hopeless at their jobs? I find that hard to believe

Who was this Sam Bacile who seemed to be oblivious of the threats against the life of Salman Rushdie for writing *Satanic Verses*, which offended Muslim sensibilities? Had he never heard of the actual murder of Dutchman Theo Van Gogh who was critical of radical Islam, especially after the 9/11 attacks and wrote about violence against women in Muslim societies? Van Gogh was killed by Mohammed Bouyeri who shot him eight times, stabbed him and attempted to cut off his head. After his arrest, Bouyeri explained he was fulfilling his duty as a Muslim.

The *Associated Press* and the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that Sam Bacile was an Israeli-American. The incendiary film had cost \$5 million and was financed with money culled from "more than 100 Jewish donors".

Aha! The Jews again: I guess you knew it would be them all along!

Now before reminding you of the real story, I think you can already spot the problem with this version and I bet you

have never even been to journalism school and been taught over and over again to check your facts.

Jews generally don't go around attacking other people's religions. It is of course possible that one might behave out of character but the fact that he found the rather tidy total of "one hundred" or so others Jews to finance it, was simply not credible.

Then there is that precious Jewish word "*seichel*".

If you do something that is going to get you into trouble and in this case "trouble" might just mean someone trying to secure his place in Islamic heaven by decapitating you, then don't go around telling people who you are and what your name is. That's called *seichel*.

Those who have it are considered wise, those without it are sometimes considered imbeciles. Some individuals who can't even aspire to the level of imbecile, work writing stories for *Associated Press* and the *Wall Street Journal* and blithely repeat the claims of a man who tells them he is a Jew backed by one hundred other Jews.

Check your facts *Wall Street Journal*; likewise, *Associated Press*. I mean before you print a story, not afterwards!

When real journalism eventually asserted itself, the filmmaker was found to be Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, a 55-year-old Egyptian Coptic Christian and convicted felon.

Not a Jew with a hundred Jewish backers after all.

What a surprise!

Devin Harner, an assistant professor of English at John Jay College of Criminal Justice/City University of New York, where he teaches journalism, film, and contemporary literature wrote:

"The AP clearly dropped the ball on the original story, and perpetuated a latently anti-Semitic narrative that resulted in headlines such as 'Israel Distances Itself from Prophet Muhammad Film' (as if the burden of distancing should be on them). They (the *Associated Press*) somehow figured out that Sam Bacile didn't exist and that his address and phone number were remarkably similar to that of Nakoula."

Two days after the *Wall Street Journal* published their original, "It's them pesky Jews again" piece, Bret Stephens of the same paper published a story entitled:

"Who is 'Sam Bacile'? New intriguing leads on the man who made the world's most deadly movie trailer."

Stephens wrote, "On Tuesday, the *Journal* spoke to a man who claimed to be the director and called himself Sam Bacile."

He then reported the true story, apparently not too concerned with the fact that his paper had supplied the false one just two days before.

Devin Harner commented: "The news-consuming public were only fooled because of journalists' sloppy reporting and lack of fact-checking."

He also pointed out that the same sloppy reporting "perpetuated a latently anti-Semitic narrative".

Film L.A. Inc. grants filming permits in Los Angeles County where the film was made. A simple inquiry to them would have revealed that the production company for the film was a Duarte, California-based Christian group. The president of that organization is a Christian from Egypt.

So that takes me back to where I began.

Are the *Wall Street Journal* and *Associated Press* reporters indeed simply hopeless at their jobs? I find that hard to believe; these are after all reputable news organizations. That leads me to wonder what other reason they may have for not checking the facts, when what they wrote about clearly waved so many warning flags and advanced an anti-Semitic slander.

I also wonder what will happen over the next year if AP and WSJ journalists continue to forget Journalism rule 101 "Check the facts".

If someone were to attack me or another Jew on a bus in New York or anywhere else in the USA because they were enraged by believing the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Associated Press* original story, CNN's Gaza coverage or the picture of the dead Syrian children killed by Assad, could I or other identifiable Jews who became victims of their sloppy reporting sue?

It's a serious question. Press bias is no laughing matter.