

Laurie Goodstein and the New York Times: Weighed, and found wanting

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Laurie Goodstein, who reports for *The New York Times* on Islam in America without, apparently, ever thinking she has a responsibility to study the texts and tenets of Islam, and to learn about, and be keenly aware of, the arts of Taqiyya and Tu-Quoque in which Muslim spokesmen are so well-versed so that she, too, may not be fooled, has done it again: given evidence of her journalistic malpractice.

For example, on November 23, 2009, round about Thanksgiving (a non-Muslim holiday and thus one Muslims are instructed not to observe), Laurie Goodstein published a piece entitled “Three Clergyman, Three Faiths, One Friendship.” The title alone promises naive nonsense. The loaded phrase of “three faiths” – seemingly so neutral, so innocent – must cause your heart to sink, as it caused mine. You steel yourself, don’t you, perhaps taking a walk around the kitchen, before actually

plunging into the promised idiocy. And you think of Laurie Goodstein writing this stuff, and her editors vetting this stuff, and the readers, the unwary and ill-prepared readers, that is, being subject to this deeply sinister stuff.

And here is Laurie Goodstein in “Three Clergymen, Three Faiths, One Friendship” article:

What distinguishes the “amigos,” who live in Seattle but make presentations around the country, is a unique approach to what they call “the spirituality of interfaith relations.” At the church in Nashville, the three clergymen, dressed in dark blazers, stood up one by one and declared what they most valued as the core teachings of their tradition. The minister said “unconditional love.” The sheik said “compassion.” And the rabbi said “oneness.”

The room then grew quiet as each stood and recited what he regarded as the “untruths” in his own faith. The minister said that one “untruth” for him was that “Christianity is the only way to God.” The rabbi said for him it was the notion of Jews as “the chosen people.” And the sheik said for him it was the “sword verses” in the Koran, like “kill the unbeliever.”

“It is a verse taken out of context,” Sheik Rahman said, pointing out that the previous verse says that God has no love for aggressors. “But we have to acknowledge that ‘kill the unbelievers’ is an awkward verse,” the sheik said as the crowd laughed. “Some verses are literal, some are metaphorical, but the Koran doesn’t say which is which.”...

As the crowd laughed.

And a good time was had by all. And Laurie Goodstein has refrained from informing us as to whether that “awkward verse” is in fact ever taken as metaphorical by Muslims, or whether they receive it – Reader Response is not just for MLA papers

anymore – as literal. And surely that is important. Why didn't she? Some try, as Sheik Rahman did, to confuse unwary Infidels, in this case not by hiding the verse, but by deliberately quoting it, and in so doing, making his audience think that of course it cannot possibly mean what it appears to mean, for if it did, he – Sheik Rahman – would certainly not quote it, would he? In this case, and in so many others, the audience apparently has failed to understand the most obvious trick in the book. When you know that sooner or later, one way or another, your audience is going to find out about something despite your best efforts to prevent that, you might as well give it to them yourself, and at the same time provide such a mountebank's accompanying patter-and-chatter that the "reception" of that new information will be molded by Groupthink, as it was in this case: "As the crowd laughed."

And that is how, in this telling case, Rahman, the Muslim amigo, handled, or rather manipulated, his Christian amigo, and his Jewish amigo, and all his mainly potential amigos laughing away in the audience.

Rahman is a Sufi, and from Bangladesh, the son of a Bangladeshi diplomat. For all I know he may well be one of the Muslim handful of "nonviolent extremists" – that is, at the very far, and completely unrepresentative end of the spectrum. But being a Sufi means nothing as far as peace and tolerance and so on go; it describes a manner of worship, and not the contents of belief. Many Sufis have engaged in violent Jihad over the past 1350 years, and some of the most dangerous Muslim groups, such as the Deobandis, are Sufis.

But whatever Imam Rahman really is, or whatever his own position, he clearly misstates and misrepresents what is in the Qur'an and what 99% of Muslims take to be the meaning of that phrase, and of another hundred Jihad phrases, in the Qur'an. In other words, whether or not he himself would engage or even approve of Jihad through qital (conventional warfare) or terrorism (which Muslims regard not as we do, but as a

justified means to “even out” the playing-fields of war since Infidels now enjoy military superiority), Rahman is conducting Jihad of the “pen, tongue.”

In early August of this year, Laurie Goodstein wrote another article about Muslims in America. This was as heartwarming as the “three amigos” one: it was all about nine Muslims in America who had taken it upon themselves to make a video as part of what Goodstein credulously reported, without a syllable expressed of possible doubt, as an effort to appeal to fellow American Muslims to abjure “extremism.” Unfortunately Laurie Goodstein apparently did not look into a single one of the nine. She did not do even the kind of research any of us could and would do were we covering such a story, which is simply to look into the nine Muslims who claimed to be working against “extremism” and doing their bit. Shouldn’t it be the duty of a reporter to find out what the views of these people, their previous works and days, insofar as the information is relevant to their having a hand in a video that counsels against “extremism” – what kind of “extremism”? “Extremism” by whom, against whom? None of this matters to Laurie Goodstein. One wonders just how taxing her job must be, when she only has to write a story or two a week, and can’t be bothered, apparently, even to do the most elementary checking, to see if there is anything that might illuminate further the story for her readers.

And what about her layers upon layers of editors, at that famously self-celebratory “newspaper of record” (whatever that phrase means or could mean nowadays), that is, The New York Times, those editors who presumably read and re-read, meticulously, Goodstein’s story about the nine American Muslims who made the video?

Why did they not find out what Robert Spencer discovered quite quickly and posted *urbi et orbi*? That was the question I posted in discussing what Spencer had so quickly discovered, what Goodstein had apparently never discovered, and what The

New York Times, I felt, now had a journalistic duty to supply to its readers.

Here is what I wrote more than a month ago, on August 2, 2010. Neither The New York Times, nor Laurie Goodstein, has seen fit to correct the record about these nine men:

If only those who write for The New York Times, such as Laurie Goodstein, could understand that they have a responsibility not to credulously accept such efforts as [Muslims Make Video to Rebut Militants](#).” That title parrots exactly the Muslim line that this is a heartfelt attempt to “rebut militants” rather than what it in truth is, a video in the main directed not at Muslims but at non-Muslims. It is an effort to show non-Muslims that “we, the Muslims in America, are doing the right thing, taking the right stand, and you’d better take note of this and not question the efficacy or the omissions in our video, you’d better be more than satisfied, and stop suspecting us, or else.”

If you read Laurie Goodstein’s article, you would remain entirely in the dark about those who took part in it. And since you would not have been informed about the religiously-sanctioned doctrines of Taqiyya and Kitman, and you might not be as suspicious as anyone who has either studied Islam and the (mis)representation of Islam or lived as a non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim-ruled country, you might not question that report.

But now that Robert Spencer has set out