

JOURNALISTIC

RESPONSIBILITY

Editors, Daily Planet:

Last week's op-ed from Mary Lou van Deventer about my letter to Daily Planet advertisers contains a major inaccuracy (among many lesser ones), but avoids the main point of my message entirely. Since she attacks me personally, I trust you'll allow me a few words of rebuttal.

First, I do not manage the website in question, nor do I have any connection with it. This website was established by Berkeley citizens who also believe the Daily Planet is anti-Semitic and guilty of a range of journalistic malfeasance, and the site offers copious documentation of this.

Second, I accuse the Daily Planet of obsessively publishing anti-Israel messages, many of which frequently cross the line into anti-Semitism. I never maintained that the messages were written by Daily Planet staff (though the paid contributions of Conn Hallinan and other correspondents often fall into this category). The fact is, if a publication prints hate speech, it's a purveyor of hate. If a publication prints anti-Semitism, it's anti-Semitic. That's why you won't find this kind of writing in the Chronicle, and you won't find it in the New York Times. They exercise moral discretion.

Ms. van Deventer characterizes me as "Captain of the Thought Police." But this is not an issue of free speech. It's a matter of journalistic integrity and moral judgment.

Ms. van Deventer characterizes the sentiment of many of the quotations I cite from the Daily Planet as "unfortunate." That's being kind to their writers and to the publishers. If a reader submits a letter to the Daily Planet that asserts, "Shame on all black people who refuse to protest the barbarism of the looters in New Orleans," that's blatantly racist. It lumps all black people together and holds them collectively responsible for the actions of people they have no control over, just because of the color of their skin. Yet just a few weeks ago, the Planet printed a letter that asserts, "Shame on all Jews who refuse to protest the butchery against the Palestinians." That's anti-Semitic by the very same logic. Yet East Bay citizens are subjected to this kind of hate speech in virtually every issue of the Planet.

No, this is not a First Amendment issue. The Daily Planet publishers have every right to print anything they want—from sloppy journalism and outrageously one-sided coverage to anti-Semitism. It's their money—let them waste it as they wish. But does it make good business sense for local merchants to support such reprehensible publishing? Do advertisers really think customers will be attracted to them when they see their ad adrift in a sea of one-sided polemics and hate? I don't think so.

Jim Sinkinson

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