

Roy Meachum

4/27/88

Name calling



The first rule anyone learns in this game can be summed up in Harry Truman's warning: If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen. Old Give-em-hell meant the advice for politicians, but it applies to everyone in public life, especially columnists.

The warning particularly has meaning for editorials and commentaries on the Middle East, unless viruently pro-Israel. Even attempts at balance can be rewarded by barrages, charging anti-Semitism. As a consequence, Americans' knowledge of that region has been severely cloaked by censorship, imposed on themselves by editors, reporters and commentators.

Most journalists are constrained by the very human need to be liked and appreciated by everyone, a failing shared with the political rank-and-file. Regard the media's usual targets sometimes.

Rarely does any editorial or commentary, particularly of the electronic stripe, take after any individual or issue unless first assured there exists a ready-made constituency to back the attack. Dan Rather's hoisting George Bush's petard this week presents a classic example. The only wonder lies in the vice president allowing himself to be set up. The CBS anchorman's way had been made straight by a host of anti-Bush detractors, not the least of which is the comic strip, Doonesbury.

When it comes to the Middle East, fine-line does not begin to describe the approach the bulk of American journalism adopted on the Palestinian uprisings on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Those damning pictures, which could not be denied, did not begin to appear on television, or in newspapers, until the protests had turned into their second week.

In fact, the Palestinians have been in a constant state of protest. A great irony of last year's heat to win papal diplomatic recognition of Israel was that it came at the very time the Vatican's Bethlehem University was shut down, and its students had been assaulted by security forces.

In truth, most American journalists remain as ignorant as their readers on the Middle East. When the Iranians seized the U.S. embassy, my former colleague Walter CronkHITE learned first from me the difference between Shitte

and Sunni Muslims. This came two years after Walter had made America's greatest single contribution to peace in that region by arranging for Sadat to announce his historic visit to Jerusalem.

As a people, Americans have been conditioned to regard all Arabs as hostile, blood-thirsty, ignorant savages whose single goal in life is the destruction of Western values and civilization. In fact, as individuals, they tend to be more docile than their Western counterparts; in part, because their Islamic religion teaches submissiveness to God, and, by extension, to His earthly representatives.

As for ignorance, while in Egypt, I was startled to learn that 25 percent of that nation's young people attend university. In a recent *Jerusalem Post*, I read that a higher percentage of Palestinians (18 percent) have some college education as compared to Israeli Jews, only 14 percent.

Now, reporting that fact does not make me an anti-Semite, nor does criticising the terrible botch a series of governments has made of the original dream of Israel. From where I sit, that country's problems have been greatly exacerbated by the over-protective tendency of this country, goaded by well-meaning groups and individuals, many of them still reacting to the Holocaust. By their light, Arabs are resurrected Nazis intent upon their people's destruction. But history records that, when Europe's Christian kings attempted to eradicate Jews, it

was the Arab empire that provided refuge.

Given a lack of further provocation, I believe harmony can be restored among all the Semitic people. Arabs are Semites too, raising the interesting possibility that attacks upon Arabs could be considered anti-Semitic also.

As for individuals who attempt to stick me with that label, the problem is entirely theirs.

These columns will continue to reflect, as in the past, my great respect for the contributions to this nation made by Americans of the Mosaic faith. I refuse to discriminate against any man or woman, for any reason, including his

faith.

To cite but one example, I supported Steve Sachs in his race for governor. Anyone who believes that support was intended to cloak my anti-Semitism belongs on a funny farm feeding chickens, but under close supervision.

The other topic that seems to generate heat in my direction seems to be my questioning of politicians' official performances. Frederick Mayor Ronald Young leads the list.

For suggesting that the mayor make public disclosure of his backers in his new ventures into business, I have been roundly berated by several individuals, including Mr. Young. As a declared, although not officially announced, candidate for re-election, I would have thought the mayor would have considered disclosure in his best interest.

Instead, Mr. Young has hunkered down into silence. But not before he accused me of "outright lies" for the column in which I reported he was planning to open the restaurant, now doing splendid business on Market Street.

At no time have I accused the mayor of anything, except the arrogance of insisting the public has no right to know anything except what he chooses to reveal, as he told a News-Post reporter.

From my continuing request for disclosure, his supporters have fashioned all sorts of figments, chiefly from their belief that the mayor can do no wrong. One Letter to the Editor writer demanded to know how my wife had opened her antique store, suggesting hanky-panky on my part.

While my practice is not to answer

investive, I cannot permit Sharon to be pulled into my differences with the man in City Hall without some response.

The money invested in her store came entirely from the Meachums' pocket; my contribution was very small. The business represents the culmination of her hopes after 27 years in the retail trade. Working for Saks and Henri Bendel in New York and Neiman-Marcus and Mark Cross in Washington, she wanted to put that experience in her own business. She has collected and traded antiques since she was a girl. We still have her first purchase, a wooden bowl bought for 50 cents.

Furthermore, Sharon invested her money and her hopes in Frederick while I was still commuting to NBC. She was in business long before my name was known in this county. My first column for this newspaper was written in her shop.

While I am prepared to face the public fire, I do not think my wife should be dragged into the efforts of the mayor's more violent supporters to protect their man. She holds no public office; if that were the case, then she might be fair game.

As for me, I don't always find Mr. Truman's kitchen comfortable, but after all these years I've learned to live with the heat.

In the meanwhile, the noisy persiflage raised by his supporters makes me wonder more: Where did the mayor get all that money to open a business in which, unlike my wife in her field, he had absolutely no experience?