

Press Coverage Sometimes Skews Needed Information.
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Two stories that, thanks to the press and social media, went viral, immediately raised red flags for me. I don't think "one hand clapping" informs the public on complex issues that deserve more thought.

The first was the coverage of Ahmed Muhamed, the 14-year-old Texas high schooler who brought a home-made digital clock to school to "impress his teachers," he said. The engineering teacher saw it and had no problem with it. Another teacher, however, noted it when its alarm went off and it frightened her. She confiscated the device and called the police, who arrested the youngster and interrogated him. Ultimately, they realized that the device was what he said it was: not a bomb, but a clock. These are the facts.

But what went viral was something else: a Muslim child singled out because he was Muslim. Immediately, the press jumped all over this story as an example of foolish "Islamophobia" and the child was deluged with support (and even promises of college interest), including Silicon Valley and the White House weighing in on his being the kind of student they were all looking for.

And indeed, he may be that kind of student. But the teacher and the police were not silly to have worried otherwise. Put yourself in their place: can you imagine the outrage and blame that they would face if they ignored a potential bombing that could kill school children? The police chief hastened to say that their concern would have been the same had the youngster been white. Most school murderers have, by and large, been white, starting with Columbine. They over-reacted this time, but what about next time?

However, there is another problem in our time: the recruitment of Muslim youth to ISIL and other radical Muslim terror groups. The "Lone Wolf" attack is being encouraged and daily the authorities find and arrest most of them. Ahmed Muhamed, born to pious and activist Sudanese parents, already claims that he was picked on at his school, called "terrorist" by some. Being a nerd didn't help his popularity either (not his fault).

He has now announced that he will not go back to his school. I will be very interested to find out where he will go. Since he was defended by the legal arm of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), whose hijab-dressed woman lawyer sat beside him at the press conference, I would hope he doesn't wind up in a Muslim school. This should worry us. I think it was very hasty to condemn the school and the police for their concern. We may come to rue this in the future.

The other press coverage problem was fueled by the painful picture of Aylan Kurdi, the adorable tot who lay drowned on a Turkish beach after the trafficker's boat carrying Syrian refugees capsized. This picture has triggered the sympathy instincts of many Europeans and Americans, which is good. The Syrian families escaping unending horrors in war-torn Syria should be sheltered and taken in by countries that can have them. Most of these families, we are told, are middle class and professional, Christian or secular Muslim. They will be an asset as immigrants.

However, the press coverage seems to have deliberately overlooked focus on some of the more unsavory migrants. Videos of refugee hordes show mostly young men, with families few and far between. We don't get that impression when reporters seek out attractive English speaking refugees or focus on their children. Nobody interviewed the Muslim migrants who threw their Christian boat-mates overboard. I never heard whether they were arrested upon arrival, and I fear they were not.

Reporters are our eyes and ears. I would want them to present the situation truthfully, not looking for the human-interest focus that may skew what is happening. We should have sympathy for the Syrian families fleeing a civil war, even without the heartbreak of a dead baby.

But others, single men from North Africa, Congo, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq should be very carefully vetted. There are snakes among them who mean us harm.

679 words

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