

# Slander & Its Uses



Here's Liz Smith, the syndicated celebrity gossip columnist and the undisputed *numero uno* of her genre, writing about yours truly recently: "The

phone rang with an anonymous caller who wanted to say that Taki Theodora-copulos is a 'neo-Nazi and anti-Semite' and that I should be ashamed for mentioning his magazine *The American Conservative*. The caller added, 'He has nothing to do with the Conservative Party.'"

Dear, oh dear! Liz has been my friend for close to 30 years and has always reported my shenanigans with humor and a generosity of spirit, but this time she really dropped the ball. An anonymous caller? Puh-leez! Just for starters, Liz's calls are screened, and I think it would have been easier to get through to Ben Bradlee during Watergate than Liz Smith. Second of all, since when does as experienced a columnist—over 50 years in the business—repeat allegations from an anonymous caller? Would my buddy Liz have published charges of child molestation or serial murders? What then? Would the fuzz come after me? After all, an anonymous caller can say anything. That is why anonymous calls remain mostly anonymous and unprintable.

What I suspect is that Liz received a call from above and is protecting the caller. Who is the vicious Mr. Big? Fools might try to reason; wise men never try. Like anonymous hate mail, one doesn't give it a second's thought—until one sees it in a friend's respected syndicated column, that is.

What I truly suspect happened is that we, *The American Conservative*, are doing something right. Our stance has been vindicated: in one year we have become the heart and soul of what conservatism is all about. Ergo the cheapest

of debating tricks, writing (in this case calling) *ex cathedra*: I assert, therefore it is. Vladimir Nabokov called such stuff *poshlost*, "corny trash, vulgar clichés, Philistinism in all its phases, imitations of imitations." I call it a pathetic attempt to discredit a small magazine that got it right all along, an abuse of anti-anti-Semitism, and an oft-tried wolf cry.

Charges of anti-Semitism, like mud, tend to stick, and that was the purpose of the slander. What brought it on? That's an easy one. My stance for the right of Palestinians to resist occupation, and the fact that America's support of Ariel Sharon's brutal policies has subordinated American interests and values to the vagaries of militant Zionism. Having said that, I have also insisted in print that, in its attitude toward Jews, the Muslim world today resembles Germany of the 1930s—a time of state-sponsored hate and caricatures of a people based solely on their religion.

Coincidentally, the Liz Smith item appeared the same time Gregg Easterbrook got into trouble over his criticism of Miramax and its parent company Disney for seeking profit by wallowing in gore. (This is handled elsewhere in the magazine.) What I did agree with in Easterbrook's writing was the following: "Recent European history alone ought to cause Jewish executives to experience second thoughts about glorifying the killing of the helpless as a fun lifestyle choice." Actually I thought this passage philo-Semitic, certainly not anti-Semitic. If anything historic applies to present Israeli policies, it is the fact that people

who have suffered like the Jews have should know better. But then, as Bill Buckley has written, "minority exertions on foreign policy tend to have extortional effects." In other words, our friends the neocons are playing hardball with anyone who has the slightest doubt that Sharon is the Second Coming. Here is Bill again: "There are inherited distinctive immunities about Israel and the Jews..." I agree, but depriving people of the right to equality and freedom and keeping them under occupation is hardly a democratic act.

But back to anti-Semitism. I don't know many people who judge ethnic or religious groups as displaying fixed behavior. Sure, there are jokes galore, especially about Jews, mostly told by Jews, and they are very funny indeed. After all, when the joking has to stop, totalitarianism starts. Those who use anti-Semitism as a club for the apostomasis of their political opponents are the very people whom the ADL should go after. Abusing anti-Semitism is the order of the day, thanks to the neocon creed of taking no prisoners. (If any of them had served in the armed forces perhaps they'd understand that taking prisoners is as honorable a duty as resisting the enemy.) Here's Ran HaCohen, a teacher in Tel Aviv and a writer in *Yedioth Achronot*, on the abuse of anti-Semitism: "Nowadays, an orthodox Jew can run for the most powerful office on earth. A Jew can be the mayor of Amsterdam in 'anti-semitic' Holland, a minister in 'anti-semitic' Britain, a leading intellectual in 'anti-semitic' France, a president of 'anti-semitic' Switzerland, or an industrial tycoon in 'anti-semitic' Russia. A converted Jew is even mentioned as a possible successor to the Holy See." I hope no one rings Liz about the last one. ■