

How many Muslim readers hath the New York Times?

A note on the paper's decision not to show the Charlie Hebdo cover after the attack

The decision of The New York Times not to depict the cover of Charlie Hebdo after ten of the French magazine's journalists had been murdered by Islamic terrorists has drawn much deserved criticism in the United States and abroad, in comments from the editorial page editor of the Denver Post to a reporter's charge of "cowardice" in the German newsweekly DER SPIEGEL.

Within the ranks of Times editors the decision not to depict the cover, which showed a tearful Prophet Muhammad holding up a "Je Suis Charlie" sign, was defended by Executive Editor Dean Baquet:

"My first most important job is to serve the readers of The New York Times, and a big chunk of the readers of The New York Times are people who would be offended by showing satire of the Prophet Muhammad...That reader is a guy who lives in Brooklyn and is Islamic and has a family and is devout and just happens to find that insulting."

Some might be surprised that among Brooklyn's Muslim population (3.73% or 95,000 out of 2.5 million) there can be found a "big chunk" of the Times' readership. Among them would be the paper's Public Editor Margaret Sullivan who voiced her disagreement with Baquet's decision and observed:

"The cartoon itself, while it may disturb the sensibilities of a small percentage of Times readers, is neither shocking nor gratuitously offensive."

It's got to be either that "big chunk" of Times readers

potentially offended by the cover, or just a “small percentage” among them whose sensibilities would have been disturbed. Curious minds do indeed want to know and may not be satisfied with a Bill Clintonian explanation: depends on what your definitions of “big chunk” and “small percentage” are.