

## Freedom of poking fun

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Comment

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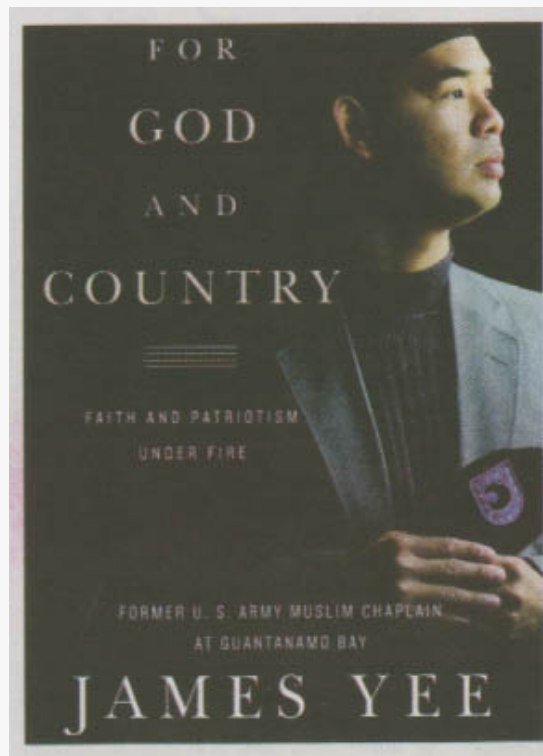
The Facebook-based competition, Everyone Draw Mohammed (sic) Day!, on May 20 is said to promote "freedom of expression".

It brings to mind a talk that I attended on the eve of the day in Penang.

The speaker was retired Captain James Yee, who acted as US Army chaplain at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba in 2001.

A third-generation Chinese in the United States, he was born into the Lutheran faith. This was to change when he was challenged in a dialogue for speaking out against Islam.

Admitting that he did not know anything about the religion, he was at a loss to convince his audience of his views on Islam. Later, he studied Islam and became a Muslim in 1991. He took the name of Yusuf Yee.



A question arises as to how many contestants know what to draw, let alone who to draw?

Unlike other deities and godheads, no one has ever seen Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, assuming that participants know who he is.

His existence as a Prophet of Islam is denied by many. On what basis will the contest be judged? On the likeness to his looks? Impossible.

My guess would be based on the most obnoxious piece of work said to represent him, which by implication would further incite anger and even more hatred!

That this would be the most probable outcome has, perhaps, led cartoonist Molly Norris, who first inspired the controversial idea, to reportedly condemn the effort and issue an apology to Muslims a few days later. "I apologise to people of Muslim faith and ask that this 'day' be called off," she was quoted as saying.

Norris protested the decision by US television channel Comedy Central in April to cancel an episode of the popular show over its depiction of the Prophet.

She then proposed May 20 as an Everybody Draw Mohammed Day.

Later, writing on her website ([mollynorris.com](http://mollynorris.com)) she denied having anything to do with the Facebook initiative and emphasised that her idea was satire but "was taken seriously, hijacked and made viral".

Satirical or otherwise, the damage has been done.

And Yee's talk provided us enough clues as to why such an unthinking suggestion is so toxic to begin with. In particular, he related how interrogators at the detention camps in Guantanamo Bay (mis)use Islam to break the will and resolve of innocent Muslims "detainees" (the preferred word to "prisoners").

This ranges from deliberately desecrating the Holy Qur'an to forcing Muslims to perform Satanic acts of worship, which make the idea of a drawing competition on Facebook rather petty.

Yee should know as the Muslim "chaplain" who conducted classes on Islam to US soldiers, especially after Sept 11. Later he was posted to Guantanamo as adviser on Islam and its practices to the camp commander as well as a chaplain with unlimited access to Muslims detainees (about 660 from 40 different countries, including some as young as 12-years-old). For 10 months, he saw and experienced first-hand what took place in the prison camps. Lee received high praise for his tour of duty.

But being a Muslim, Yee too was not spared. He was "unfairly accused of grave offences and unjustifiably placed in solitary confinement (in Guantanamo) for 76 days". Finally, the West Point graduate was honourably discharged from the army on January 2005.

He underwent the same hell as the other detainees — shackled, subjected to sensory deprivation, isolated in a space no bigger than a toilet cubicle without anyone knowing where he was.

All because of unfounded allegations that he is a terrorist spy!

Yee is still waiting for an apology from the US government and the military for his ordeal during which he was literally deprived of any "freedom".

You would have thought that we ought to be championing such "freedom" issues instead of the "freedom" of poking fun at the expense of others!

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