

WLW and Bill Cunningham are at it again. On Monday Bill Cunningham proclaimed on his radio show: "The war of this generation is the war against Islamic fascists. They do not live for life, they live for death. Only through death can they, they believe, be with the 72 virgins in heaven and have sex with children for eternity, which is the goal of that religion. It's despicable and it's wrong."

Such a false statement promotes a vastly inaccurate and unfair image of the faithful followers of "that religion." The level of ignorance of Islam, one of the world's great religions, that such comments reflect is too profound to address here. Yet, it must be said that these comments are extremely harmful to a faith community that is especially vulnerable right now to bigotry and negative stereotyping.

WLW's pattern of permitting unchecked the socially irresponsible and hurtful insults from its "talk" medium, is deplorable. Our Muslim neighbors are just the latest in a long line of "talk" victims of Clear Channel and Cunningham. Previously, we have heard similarly reprehensible rhetoric from Clear Channel and Cunningham directed at African Americans, Jews, gays, women and other easy targets of inter-group prejudice.

Most recently, the station aired comments and plastered advertisements on billboards around our city derogatory to our community's Hispanic population. All of these comments are hateful, harmful, counter-community, and perhaps worst of all, designed to attract ratings for a radio program.

WLW's social irresponsibility hurts everyone and embarrasses our entire community. Cunningham has admitted many times in the past to pandering to his audience with reckless and outlandish comments merely to gain ratings.

As a community committed to inclusion and unity, we need to call WLW to task and discredit its tactics as a media outlet. Unfortunately, WLW and other media players will continue to pander to specific demographics that drive ratings and higher advertising revenues; however, WLW's on-going and unapologetic pursuit of "hate ratings" is undermining our community.

Of course, the question is not whether Cunningham and his station have the right to air these statements. Freedom of speech is the right of all citizens. Rather, the question must be, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled, whether we choose to listen.

BRIDGES for a Just Community, formerly NCCJ, has a long history with this particular radio station dating back to the early '90s, when we teamed up with Xavier University to sponsor original research into the social impact of talk radio. Our research showed that listeners of talk radio admitted the influence of talk radio hosts in forming their social and political views, contrary to the dismissive claim of WLW and others that, "we're just entertainers, no one takes us seriously."

BRIDGES takes WLW seriously. We urge everyone, too.

In truth, the “war of this generation” is no different from the war of generations past: it is the war against bigotry and intolerance involving those who would perpetuate hatred and divisiveness in their pursuit of political power or commercial gain against those who are striving – as Cincinnati’s leaders are – to create a welcoming, united and caring community for all of us.

WLW, please be the “great Americans” you purport to be!

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Robert C. “Chip” Harrod