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Helen Thomas Retires After Controversial Comment on Palestine

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Hearst Newspapers announced Monday the immediate retirement of Helen Thomas in the midst of an uproar over her comments that Jews should "get the hell out of Palestine."

"Her decision came after her controversial comments about Israel and the Palestinians were captured on videotape and widely disseminated on the Internet," Hearst said in a statement.

Earlier Monday, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs issued a broadside about Thomas' remarks during a nationally televised briefing with Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen over the BP oil spill in

the Gulf of Mexico.

Asked by a reporter if he had discussed Thomas' statement with President Obama, Gibbs replied, "I have not spoken with him directly on that. I'll say this . . . I think those remarks were offensive and reprehensible. I think she should and has apologized, because obviously those remarks do not reflect certainly the opinion of, I assume, most of the people in here and certainly not of the administration."

Ibrahim Hooper, director of communications for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, defended Thomas, though not her comments.

"Obviously her remarks were inappropriate," Hooper told AOL News in a phone interview. But, he said, "she's been a target of the pro-Israeli lobby for quite some time. She obviously gave them an opportunity to marginalize her voice in the media."

On May 27, Rabbi David F. Nesenoff of the website [RabbiLive](#) asked Thomas if she had any comments on Israel.

"Tell them to get the hell out of Palestine," she said. "Remember, these people are occupied. And it's their land. It's not German, it's not Poland." When Nesenoff asked Thomas where the Israelis should go, she said they should "go home" to Germany, Poland and the U.S.

The 89-year-old Thomas, who is of Lebanese descent, was the first female member of the White House Correspondents' Association and the prestigious Gridiron Club. She has covered the White House since the 1960s.

She began her career as a correspondent with United Press International in 1943. According to her website, she has covered the administrations of 10 U.S. presidents.

Video of the gaffe has been widely circulated on the Internet.



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Thomas apologized on her website on June 4:

"I deeply regret my comments I made last week regarding the Israelis and the Palestinians. They do not reflect my heartfelt belief that peace will come to the Middle East only when all parties recognize the need for mutual respect and tolerance. May that day come soon."

But Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, demanded a "more sincere" apology.

"Helen Thomas' statement of regret does not go far enough," he said in a statement. "Thomas needs to make a more forceful and sincere apology for the pain her remarks have caused."

Before Hearst's announcement of Thomas' retirement, Ari Fleischer, the former spokesman for President George W. Bush, said the Hearst news organization should fire her: "As someone who is Jewish, and as someone who worked with her and used to like her, I find this appalling."

Lanny Davis, former White House counsel under President Clinton, called Thomas "an anti-Semitic bigot."

Over the weekend, Thomas lost [her contract with the speaking agency](#) Nine Speakers.

"Ms. Thomas has had an esteemed career as a journalist, and she has been a trailblazer for women, helping others in her profession and beyond. However, in light of recent events, Nine Speakers is no longer able to represent Ms. Thomas, nor can we condone her comments on the Middle East," agency President Diane Nine said in a statement.

On Sunday, a high school in Bethesda, Md., canceled plans for Thomas to deliver a speech at its graduation ceremonies.

"[Graduation celebrations are not the venue for divisiveness](#)," Walt Whitman High School Principal Alan Goodwin wrote in an e-mail to students and parents.

On June 5, [Sarah Palin took to her Twitter feed to condemn Thomas' "racist rant"](#) -- and unidentified members of the media who Palin said had condoned it.

"Helen Thomas press pals condone racist rant? Heaven forbid 'esteemed' press corps represent society's enlightened elite; Rest of us choose truth," the ex-governor tweeted.

Joe Klein of Time magazine called Thomas' words "[odious](#)." He said Thomas should no longer be allowed to sit in the front row in the White House Press Room, where she is an honorary fixture.

"I don't see any reason why the president, Robert Gibbs or any other representative of the government should feel any obligation to take her questions," Klein [wrote](#).

According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations' Hooper, Thomas' emotions might have "got the best of her."

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