

The story of the Time Out Truce

Written by Sean Wells Contributing Artist
Friday, 04 December 2020 05:59

I created this image for my Big Sister (from the Big Brother Big Sister program), Victoria Rabinowe, who is a Santa Fe artist. She has been upset at the mudslinging from both sides of the major political parties and had a deep concern for the upcoming elections knowing the race would be tight and delays in vote counting would be inevitable. She wanted to create a movement to encourage people to bury the political party hatchet during this period of vote counting and wait together as Americans.

We came up with the hashtag #TimeOutTruce to encourage a peaceful period. She asked me to consider creating an image to support this. What better way to show a truce than to show the iconic donkey and elephant in an embrace?

But, as I designed the image, I couldn't help but wonder, why a donkey and elephant? Why blue and red? The answers were quite interesting and something you don't learn in history class!

ANIMAL INSTINCTS

The animal icons first appear in 1828 with the heated and contentious election of Andrew Jackson. Both parties used the papers and political posters to mar the reputation of their opponents (referred to as "mudslinging") using political cartoons to get their message across quickly. John Quincy Adams depicted Andrew Jackson as a jackass, playing on his last name and illustrating him as dumb and stubborn. But, rather than being upset, Jackson embraced the symbol as a creature of perseverance and able to carry great loads far distances without complaint.

In a brilliant move, he hijacked the donkey symbol in his own campaign marketing, winning the election.

The elephant came along much later, in 1864 with a pro-Lincoln poster featuring an elephant carrying a banner. At the time, post-civil war era, a popular phrase, "to see the elephant," meant, "to go to battle." The elephant was used as a symbol of strength and fearlessness. But, it has also become a symbol of the oppressor, with a lack of consideration and a sense of intimidation.

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The famous political satirist Thomas Nast adopted both the donkey and the elephant to represent the political parties and began to use them to illustrate difficult and complicated subjects like racism, slavery, poverty and other important issues of then and today. Others began to pick up on the symbols and anthropomorphize them.

POLITICAL CARTOONS: NOTHING TO LAUGH ABOUT

The virality and efficiency of the political cartoon makes it a powerful and persuasive vehicle to relay a strong message, much like the modern day meme. You can share a meme with people of opposing viewpoints and still appreciate the humor of the image, even if you don't agree on the message. The historical role of the political cartoonist is critical to preserve our country's democracy and freedom. As an artist, I am grateful to live in a country where I can create art that can make a social commentary without fear of legal punishment from the government.

I was broken-hearted to read about the attacks, threats and deaths to the staff of the French paper Charlie Hebdo for a political cartoon about the Islamic religion. I am not defending the cartoon, I am defending the right to create the cartoon and the right to respond to the cartoon in a passionate and public way, but without violence. We need voices to speak without fear on difficult topics to keep them in the news and keep them in the discussion of what is right and wrong and just and immoral in our country and in the world.

Societal views are not a fixed thing, they are shifting. Political cartoons can help us gauge where we stand as a whole.

THESE COLORS DON'T BLEED!

The colors are much easier to understand. Up until the year 2000, colors like yellow, red, white and blue had all been used interchangeably in various publications to describe winning states and losing states on maps for the presidential election. As publications became bigger and mass media, like color television solidified the visual language for the political race, the colors became iconic. During the Bush-Gore race, a race that came down to a mere 537 votes, the iconic red for Republicans and blue for Democrats became consistently used across all media

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outlets and has been adopted ever since.

OTHER FUNNY FACTS

The President of Sri Lanka gifted a baby elephant to President Gerald Ford. They dedicated a room in the White House to elephants.

Just like Jose Guadalupe Posada, the turn-of-the-century printmaker who commented on the Mexican political atmosphere, Thomas Nast died penniless.

Please share your colored pages on Facebook with the hashtag #TimeOutTruce!

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