



Randy Hines

editing tips

More Hot Water for Cartoonists

By Randy Hines

The water temperature was not below freezing in Hades, but Robert Murdoch did it anyway. He apologized for February's infamous New York Post cartoon of a chimp shot by a police officer that some thought was a racist insult of President Barack Obama.

Publisher tycoon Murdoch issued his apology in a bylined piece in the Post. "Over the past couple of days, I have spoken to a number of people and now I better understand the hurt this cartoon caused," he wrote. "It was not meant to be racist, but unfortunately, it was interpreted by many as such."

Cartoonist Sean Delonas, in his defense, said he was tying in current news events – the attacking chimp shot by police and the circus atmosphere surrounding the stimulus package. Post editor Col Allan, who approved and defended the cartoon, said, "It broadly mocks Washington's efforts to revive the economy." The Rev. Al Sharpton, a longtime critic of the Post, was the ringleader for the onslaught of criticism.

So what's the purpose of a cartoon? Is it not to ridicule, exaggerate, insult and perhaps even anger those who see it? The United States still allows free speech, so is the concern how much restraint is necessary to protect the public from being offended? Where do we stop? Cartoonists across the South have made fun of local, state and national politicians for centuries. Did Ross Perot or LBJ file lawsuits because their ears were so gigantic in the many cartoons showing a likeness to Dumbo the elephant? Will critics insist on establishing a "politically correct speech" committee to supervise cartoons in SNPA member newsrooms? What about words and pictures too? Is booing New York Yankee steroid user Alex Rodriguez now censored speech?

If you're like me, you're probably offended by lots of things you see and hear. Tolerance used to imply a person might not agree with you, but lets you have the right to express your own opinion. That's somehow twisted today to mean you must totally accept and agree with everything someone else says, does and believes, or you are labeled an intolerant extremist.

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