

Public Pedagogy and Popular Culture: Assessing Satire and Activism in an Emergent Media Landscape

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Popular culture has created a widened scope through which non-traditional political actors participate in the public sphere. Moreover, new media technology such as YouTube videos, blogs, and internet memes has created new possibilities for crafting and exacting social change. Although scholars debate whether these opportunities harm or bolster genuine political activism, the fact remains that more individuals have the ability to gain access to and influence the public conversation thereby raising consciousness and galvanizing new communities. Through a communications and cultural studies framework, this research explores the opportunities and limitations of political satire within this media landscape of evolving web technologies. This exploration considers two case studies where non-traditional groups have been able to influence the national conversation. First, we analyze the LGBTQ community's response to the National Organization for Marriage's (NOM) widely-distributed advertisement "The Gathering Storm," which opposed marriage equality and supported California's Proposition 8. The satirical and parodic video responses produced by websites like Funny or Die exposed holes in NOM's argument against marriage equality that might have remained inconspicuous without satirical intervention. Second, we examine the rhetoric of comedian Lalo Alcaraz and his ability to propel the term "self-deportation" to the national stage, eventually having the satirical term adopted into the right wing political platform. Under the pseudonym Daniel D. Portado, Alcaraz organized efforts online to promote the farcical policy, which resulted in political participation en masse on the part of otherwise alienated immigration activists. We argue that these satirical, new media-based interventions provide alternative sites of political discourse that direct attention to issues and perspectives that would otherwise be ignored in the public sphere. Consequently this type of satirical intervention serves as a public pedagogy of the people in that it has the potential to help traditionally marginalized perspectives raise political consciousness and influence decision making.

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