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Cartoonists are sad, and mad, about the attack on a French paper

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People gather in solidarity for the victims of an attack against a satirical paper, in Paris, Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2015. Masked gunmen shouting "God is great!" stormed the Paris offices of Charlie Hebdo Wednesday, killing 12 people, including its editor, before escaping in a getaway car. It was France's deadliest terror attack in living memory. Photo: AP Photo/Thibault Camus

This week, a paper in Paris was attacked. Twelve people were killed by gunmen.

Charlie Hebdo is the name of the weekly paper. It published articles and political cartoons that harshly criticized religious groups, including Muslims.

Political cartoons often cause anger in the United States. Cartoonists in the U.S. can receive angry letters and emails. Sometimes they are even threatened, but rarely do they face violence. In other parts of the world, being a cartoonist is more dangerous.

Opinion articles can explain a viewpoint and leave room for disagreement. A political cartoon is more direct, more blunt, said Kevin Siers. He is a cartoonist with the Charlotte Observer in North Carolina.

You can't argue with a cartoon: it just hits you, Siers said.

Using The Pen

Ann Telnaes is a cartoonist with the Washington Post. When she first heard about the shootings on Twitter, she was horrified. She immediately began to draw a cartoon in response. She wanted to express her anger. She wanted to honor the dead.

Other political cartoonists around the world have also used the pen to respond. In cartoons, they reach out to each other. They stand up for free speech. They mourn the cartoonists who were killed.

Telnaes has received threats before because of her cartoons. One threat brought in the FBI to investigate. Cartoons have a special power to connect with people, she said. This also means they have a special power to make people very angry.

Cartoons are visual, she said. They can be easily understood by people all over the world.

"A really well-drawn cartoon should grab you quickly," Telnaes said.

Offending Religious Groups

Political cartoonist Pat Bagley knows what it's like to offend a religious group. He lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, the center of the Mormon Church. Bagley, a former Mormon, drew cartoons making fun of Gordon B. Hinckley, an important Mormon prophet.

Many people were offended by the cartoons, Bagley said.

Bagley said he got some scary emails. "People let me know they own guns, they know how to use them, and I should be careful," he said.

In 2005 and 2006, a Danish newspaper offended many Muslims. It published cartoons showing the Prophet Muhammad in a bad light. Muslims do not show Muhammad in drawings or movies.

Many people protested against the cartoons in Muslim countries around the world. Hundreds were killed or injured in the protests.

"A Cartoonist Has A Brick"

"In Europe and the Middle East, they take cartoons deadly seriously," Bagley said. "In the U.S., we're more entertainers."

Cartoonists are rarely attacked or killed in the U.S., Bagley said.

"It happens all the time in the Middle East, and it happens way too often in South America and sometimes in Europe. It's really depressing," he said.

Clay Bennett is a cartoonist in Tennessee. He explained that writers have "a thousand pebbles to throw every day. A cartoonist has a brick."

Joel Pett is a cartoonist in Kentucky. He said the attack in France should be a reminder. It should tell cartoonists not to waste their opportunity "to draw about something that matters."

It's so tempting to draw something about celebrities "or something that has absolutely no importance," said Pett. "People are dying out there for free speech. Those of us who enjoy it owe it to them to use it in a responsible way."