Analyzing Political Cartoons: Guide to Responding

Exaggeration

The focus of this cartoon is the Obama Administration’s controversial NSA surveillance program. The commentary seems to imply the far-reaching scope of the program. The cartoonist uses exaggeration in the form of Obama’s ears. No clear ideology is being advanced, but it can be assumed that the cartoonist is making a criticism about both the program and President Obama.

Symbolism

Link: http://media.cagle.com/10/2012/12/28/124697_600.jpg
The focus of this cartoon is the infighting of the Republican Party after heavy losses sustained in the 2012 elections. The cartoonist is commenting on the fact that, due to competing ideologies within the party over its future direction, Republicans have begun to fight with each other. The use of symbolism in the form of an elephant is utilized – the animal being the historical symbol of the Republican Party. The cartoonist seems to be advancing a more liberal ideology by portraying the party as an angry stampede juxtaposed with a patiently waiting President Obama.

Irony

Link: http://media.cagle.com/46/2013/06/24/133656_600.jpg
The focus of this cartoon is the Obama Administration’s attempts to capture CIA employee Edward Snowden, who leaked details of the U.S. top-secret mass-surveillance program to the press. The cartoonist is implying that Snowden has been an embarrassment for Obama on the international stage. The irony suggests that in Obama’s attempts to use forceful measures to bring Snowden to justice, he has also been “beaten up” by criticism of his actions. Since both Republicans and Democrats have criticized this controversy, the ideological point of view could come from either side.

Analogy

Link: http://media.cagle.com/56/2012/05/02/110967_600.jpg
This cartoon is commenting on the significant increase in student-loan debt for recent college graduates. The analogy compares student-loan debt to the idiom “monkey on your back” (i.e., a burdensome nuisance). As this issue is, in general terms, nonpartisan, no ideology is presented in this cartoon. However, proposals to address the problem can certainly take on partisan dimensions.