

april fools FINAL MIXDOWN.mp3

Katrina Michalak [00:00:00] Back in 2015, four students at Arizona State University went down to Tucson to fight for a political cause.

Ben Kaufman [00:00:11] For the ballot legislation organization Wildcats. And we're out here today to talk about prop 200, which is a ballot initiative that we came up with, because it just didn't account.

Dan Miller, David Peña [00:00:19] For several parcels of land including Tucson including that of the university. So what we're doing here is taking a sign up sheet. We're grabbing down people's info. We're going to take it to. Would anyone like to change the world? Make a difference right now? Make history. All right. Do you wanna hear about it? No. All right.

Katrina Michalak [00:00:40] The four guys got over 30 students to vote yes for the ballot initiative. And it could have taken off. Besides from the fact that the whole scheme was fake. Welcome to Valley 101, a podcast by The Arizona Republic and azcentral.com. About Metro Phoenix and beyond. I'm producer Katrina Michalak. And happy April fools. In celebration of today, we'll be breaking down a prank that went viral between Arizona's two biggest rival schools and how a few Sun Devils were able to pull it off. The rivalry between ASU and U of A is nothing new, and neither is the history of jokes that run between them. And for full transparency, this is coming from an ASU student. The two universities have been going at it as far back as 1937. And the pranks have included painting the school's A's in the rivals colors, graffiti, and even attempts to get football players from one team over to the enemy's roster, even in the form of friendly kidnapping. However, in 2015, senior Ben Kaufman wanted to take things further. It was his senior year, and he wanted to do something more creative than previous pranks. Ben created a proposition called prop 200. This one was fake, but for context, this actually was a real measure back in 1958. But Ben had different plans for this proposition.

Ben Kaufman [00:02:43] We made this kernel of truth that we were trying to get a proposition on the ballot called proposition 200, which was a joke in itself because Arizona State became Arizona State University through proposition 200. In the 50s. We left a clue.

Katrina Michalak [00:03:10] According to a video he posted on YouTube, the pranksters had one objective: convince U of A students their school was built on stolen land and deserved to be returned. Then they asked people to vote on it to sign their petition. Their reasoning: The Gadsden Purchase.

Ben Kaufman [00:03:37] The Gadsden Purchase was technically illegal, and we handed out all these pamphlets that explained all this inaccurate history. And we even had a couple people debate us and ask us questions about the history and stuff like that, and we kind of just like rolled with them a little bit, placated them a little bit.

Katrina Michalak [00:03:55] Let's take an intermission for a quick, factual history lesson. The Gadsden Purchase was finalized in 1854 between Mexico and the United States, who agreed to pay Mexico \$10 million for almost 30,000 square miles of land. This land would later become parts of present day Arizona and New Mexico. The argument Ben and his friends made was that this agreement left out certain parts of land, including the parts the University of Arizona sat on. So they petitioned to give the school back to Mexico. This follows a long standing and certainly questionable joke for ASU students.

Ben Kaufman [00:04:48] That was kind of the nucleus of truth to it. We should try to stand around and make it look like we're trying to just give the school back to Mexico, because that's the joke that everybody said at the time, was that it just would be nice if we could give Tucson back in general. So it was like, what if we could? How would we do that? How would we sell that?

Katrina Michalak [00:05:05] Once Ben had this idea, he had to get the perfect crew together. He had an epic prank and needed the right men for the mission.

Ben Kaufman [00:05:18] David was a freshman, and I was like, this kid's going to be the future of this group in some way, because he was really naturally funny. He had a lot of really good, natural charisma he can just snap into a character like that. And so I was like, he'd be great for it.

Katrina Michalak [00:05:32] David Peña and Ben became friends through their shared passion for comedy. David's task: the frontman he was to smooth talk students into signing their name and getting signatures.

David Peña [00:05:50] Ben actually was a part of ASU comedy also he did Standup Versus the World, which I ended up being a part of as well. And then we became good friends through that. And then he had an idea one day of doing a prank on U of A, and of course I was already down to make it happen. Any prank is a good prank, especially if it's on the rival school.

Katrina Michalak [00:06:10] So far he had the brains and front man, but what he needed was another funny man or two. Someone who would go the extra mile and even fake their identity.

Cody Trimmell [00:06:25] Mine. Personally, I was Wayne Connelly.

Katrina Michalak [00:06:28] This is where Cody Trimmell and Dan Miller come in. Their expertise to the crew would be their involvement in the comedy scene and their outlandish abilities. Together. The four drove down to Tucson in October during football season, but not close enough to the Territorial Cup, which was toward the end of November to blow their cover. The group posed as a local student group dubbed. University of Arizona Ballot Legislation Organization of Wildcats. But if you take a minute to look at that acronym closely, does anything weird stick out to you?

David Peña [00:07:19] The acronym was U of A BLOWS in all capitals.

Katrina Michalak [00:07:27] Operation U of A BLOWS was a go.

David Peña [00:07:42] We even have a QR code that people could scan, and it would take them to enroll to become an ASU student.

Katrina Michalak [00:07:49] So how did they get Wildcats to fall for their trick? They used the slightly altered history to their advantage, but knew if they sold it in just a way, they would have had a better shot.

Cody Trimmell [00:08:05] It came down to it that we were pitching it like we wanted people to agree to the fact that an injustice had occurred. But really, on camera, you know,

the whiteboard that I was holding, you know, it said, should you give U of A back to Mexico, yes or no? So there was all this stuff that happened that wasn't recorded, that we were pitching to them that were like, oh, yeah, I can get behind that cause.

Katrina Michalak [00:08:30] That was Cody, one of the pranksters who helped execute the stunt. Well, overall, they were convincing. The guys were met with a few skeptics.

Cody Trimmell [00:08:41] There were a few individuals on campus who were pretty well versed with their history, and there were a couple of instances with 1 or 2 individuals who called this out and were like, no, that's not how it went down and thought we might have gotten caught in once or twice, but they ended up, you know, either going away or we kind of talked our way through it or they just didn't care enough.

Katrina Michalak [00:09:06] But what is a prank without an audience? They needed people to see the fast one they were pulling on their rivals. Ben had an insider behind enemy lines, a U of A student who helped be a cameraman for the prank. Taking it a step further. They also tipped the story to The Daily Wildcat, U of A's campus paper, who fell for their joke. The story was later retracted. Back home Ben sat on this prank for about a month, leading closer and closer to the big rivalry game. The week of the Territorial Cup he hit publish and well, the prank went viral.

Ben Kaufman [00:10:01] I found out that the law school debated it that day in an ethics class. They debated whether or not it was an ethical prank, and they concluded that it was ethical. I was on a radio talk show that I listened to in the car with my father growing up, when he used to do errands as a mortgage broker, where on every local news broadcast that night. We were on NPR. That was a big crown jewel. We were on a NPR national NPR segment that week that was really awesome. They tried to prank us back, and it was really terrible. That was really funny. We won that game. That was really good.

Cody Trimmell [00:10:33] Even Sparky and people in the end zone had like huge banners that said Vote Yes on Prop 200.

Katrina Michalak [00:10:40] This is Cody again.

Cody Trimmell [00:10:42] Like, people had their posters at the game. It was wild how much it blew up that year. And at the rivalry game it was really cool to see like how it ended up turning out.

Katrina Michalak [00:10:53] Backlash for the prank was minimal. Ben said he wrote a letter to ASU President Michael Crow, so the school would know who to blame for the prank if they needed a fall guy, but they got away with it. The video has almost 160,000 views on YouTube today, and it has cemented itself as a rivalry prank for the history books. Mission accomplished. Valley 101 is a podcast by The Arizona Republic and azcentral.com. If you enjoyed this episode, share it with your friends and if you haven't already, make sure you're subscribed. Don't forget to rate and review us and go ahead, give us five stars. Remember to submit your questions about Phoenix and Arizona to Valley101.azcentral.com. Your question might be in our next episode. Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @azcpodcasts. This episode was written and produced by me, Katrina Michalak. Kaely Monahan and Amanda Luberto provided additional production support. Kara Edgerson provided production oversight. Music for this and all our shows comes from Universal Production Music. Valley 101 is an Arizona Republic and azcentral.com

production. Happy April Fools from Valley 101. We'll see you next week with a brand new Valley 101 story.