Poster - I'd rather be red than dead

Object: Poster

Place of origin: United States (made)

Date: ca. 1965 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Colour offset lithograph

Credit Line: Gift of the American Friends of the V&A; Gift to the American Friends by Leslie, Judith and Gabri Schreyer and Alice Schreyer Batko

Museum number: E.117-2004

Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level C, case 3G, shelf DR3

Public access description

The poster's irreverent message subverts the American slur 'red' which can refer to either a person with Communist leanings or a Native American (as in 'red skin'). It promotes the positive idea that the right to a peaceful existence is more important than political affiliation or ethnic background.

The anti-Communist catch-phrase 'Better dead than Red' was much in evidence during Barry Golwater's 1964 presidential campaign, but the steep escalation of the Vietnam War in the later 1960s led to increasing student protest. Over the same decade, battles for civil rights centred on the African-American population, but also highlighted the cause of the Native Americans. The word 'red' is a double-entendre, referring to the pride of the Native Americans in their own indigenous identity, yet also encoding a protest against hawkish anti-communism, and possibly the build-up of nuclear weapons, during the Cold War.

Descriptive line

"I'd rather be red than dead" American propaganda poster, ca. 1965

Physical description

Anti-Vietnam War poster featuring the photographic image of a Native American woman.

Dimensions

Height: 91.5 cm, Width: 60.9 cm

Museum number

E.117-2004

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O101189/id-rather-be-red-than-poster-unknown/