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The man who made an icon

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American photographer Mannie Garcia took the picture of Barack Obama adopted for the iconic campaign posters by artist Shepard Fairey. The posters are now at the centre of a legal battle with Associated Press, which owns the rights to the image, over alleged copyright infringement.

What do you remember about taking the photo?

I was covering a press conference in April 2006, given by George Clooney about the situation in Darfur. The junior senator from Illinois (Obama) happened to be there. That photo was basically a clean head shot. It's nice but there was nothing there that said this is going to be a poster which will help someone get elected.

When did you realise it had been used for the campaign posters?

I was always aware of the poster, but it [the connection] didn't register. But on the evening of the inauguration I got all these emails from a photographer on the Philadelphia Enquirer saying "Call me now." The next day I was working at the White House, and reporters - guys I work with every day - were coming up to me, saying "Hey, was this you?"

How do you feel about it now?

I feel honoured. I didn't have to go to war to make an iconic photograph, it was right here in Washington DC. One part of me says "naughty, naughty" [towards Fairey] but the other part says the result was the first black US president in history. I'd like to talk to him and say: "Your poster's way cool man."

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