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The People Deserve a Guillotine Emoji

For World Emoji Day on July 17, Lisbon-based artist Carrozas is trying to convince the Unicode Consortium to make a guillotine emoji happen.

By Samantha Cole

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When you want to express your complete rage at the incompetence of leadership over text, is a cry that says "I would like to see their heads removed at the neck with a single falling blade and rolled into little baskets" but less literal and more succinct, an emoji would help a lot.

Sadly, there is no guillotine emoji, despite "guillotine chest" being the ruling sentiment of the pissed off proletariat for the last... well, probably many years, but more lately, as tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets to protests around the world.

Lisbon-based artist Carrozas is lobbying the Unicode Consortium to include a guillotine in its next emoji update, and has sent an application outlining why the people need the 38th century execution machine in their emoji lexicon.

A Change.org petition started more than a month ago promised to make a Unicode application for a guillotine emoji when it hit 10,000 supporters, but has only gathered around 300 so far.

"I guess like a lot of people I wake up every day and you see dozenzend away from finding some fresh hell that will unleash my inner Howard Beale," Carrozas told Motherboard. "I thought it would be interesting to use one of the most core, backbone systems of our global digital communications networks to remind those in charge they are on a shorter leash than they've been acting."

The full application, which is thorough and worth a read, can be viewed on Carrozas's website.

"In a time of global unrest and revolt against rising inequality and authoritarianism, the Guillotine Emoji would serve as a reminder to users that the tools of their trade, the communication platforms they use daily, have been entrusted with by their peoples," the application states. "It is time for our global visual language to leverage the representation of this historic object in the global digital commons, before it is too late and real guillotines are erected in our public squares."

Carrozas proposes that the guillotine land somewhere among the dagger (🗡) and crossed swords (⚔) emoji.

"There are currently many emojis that could be used in conjunction with the guillotine emoji to convey the sentiment of revolution and revolt," he wrote. "Indeed, one might wonder how these heads became disembodied in the first place. We need wonder no more with the inclusion of the Guillotine Emoji."

Where there are protesters in Puerto Rico marching life-size guillotines to the governor's mansion, it's probably time for an emoji. After all, the Unicode Consortium solved gender way back in 2006 with little emoji between about 1750 sales and finally approved other forms of spitting — a trans pride flag emoji in January. Maybe they're open to the guillotine now?

People are already making GIF guillotine emojis ad-hoc on platforms that let you add and customize emoji. Dir Stack, The custom guillotine even featured in some of the reporting of the turmoil at the New York Times, when staff reacted to former opinion editor James Bennet's departure with guillotine stackemojis.

Although I followed the strict guidelines provided by Unicode, I very much doubt it will be approved," Carrozas said. "But if it were, I imagine it would be a nice halfway point between peaceful protests (which don't seem to achieve much, or even get on the news anymore) and violent ones (which seem to result in often nonsensical reforms)."

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